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The SEVEN AGES OF WOMAN

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THE SEVEN AGES OF WOMAN

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Chapter One

THE INFANT

THE SEVEN AGES OF WOMAN

Chapter One: The Infant

ON a June morning in the year 1859 Sir Richard Flower of Barton Flowers in the county of Southampton decided that the weather was propitious for his annual progress on horseback round the confines of his demesne. The order was given to saddle his gray gelding; Lady Flower was informed that her husband would dine two hours later than usual, and upon her expressing alarm at the prospect of so long a fast for him, she was reassured by a farther announcement that he would fortify himself against the strain of waiting until six o'clock for his dinner with light refreshment at one of the outlying farms. Lady Flower sent back word to say how much she regretted not having known of Sir Richard's expedition earlier in order that she might have made an effort to overcome her headache and bid him farewell in person. To this the baronet replied with a solemn admonition to her ladyship's maid that her ladyship must on no account do anything to make her headache worse. The exchange

of courtesies being thus complete, Sir Richard mounted his gray gelding and set out, pausing for a moment at the top of the drive to look back at the Hall and respond with his crop to a handkerchief that fluttered from an upper window. In the manner of shaking his crop Sir Richard succeeded in conveying a reproof for the indiscretion of rising from bed, affection for his beloved wife, and gratification at the devotion displayed for himself. Then he turned his horse's head to the left and cantered down a grassy avenue between ancient oak trees.

Sir Richard was accustomed to give much thought to his position as holder of one of the oldest baronetcies in England, to the responsibilities that such a position laid upon himself, to the beauty and fertility of his demesne, to the timbered glories of his Hall, and to the honorable record of his family; but on the day annually devoted to riding round his ten thousand acres he never allowed himself to think about anything else. He even went so far, when in the depths of the wood neither squirrel moved nor bird chattered and there was none but the gray gelding to overhear him, as to cry aloud in exultation the motto of his house *Floreant Flores*. On this day dedicated to himself, his family, and his land, Sir Richard indulged in so many whimsicalities of behavior that an observer might have supposed him the prey of madness or the victim of degraded superstition. Thus at one point he dismounted from his horse and, kneeling in the middle of the ride, placed

an outspread palm upon the cushions of moss and incorporated the thousands of green and golden stars within his allegiance. He went farther; he laid bare the earth beneath and commanded a congregation of disturbed millipedes to acknowledge him as master. He made with his hands a cup to contain the black earth, and let it trickle through his fingers as a miser might play with his gold. "Mine," he said aloud, and stood for a moment in amazement at one who owned not merely all the green world within sight, but four thousand miles of unimaginable territory beneath his feet. "Mine," he repeated, "and after me John, and after John another Richard. Praise God that I appreciate the state of life to which He has called me"; with this apostrophe the baronet swept off his high silk hat to salute his patron.

Sir Richard kept such extravagance of speech and gesture for the solitude of the woodland. No sooner had he emerged into one of the deep, hazel-bordered lanes that intersecting his demesne reminded him, deserted though they were, of the world beyond his boundaries, than he became the least fantastic inhabitant of that decorous countryside of well-tilled farms and preserved coverts. Sir Richard was close on sixty; but his slim figure, upright carriage, and clear-cut features enhanced by iron-gray whiskers, bushy enough to show that he was not afraid of the fashion and yet not so full as to mark him down the slave of that fashion, made him appear younger at

a period when twenty-five looked middle-aged. Every good horseman gives the impression of being part of his steed, and Sir Richard on his gray gelding, with his gray whiskers and gray riding breeches and gray frieze tail-coat was as natural a centaur as Chiron himself.

"Good morning, Sir Richard."

The baronet pulled up to exchange a word with the first of his tenant farmers he was to meet that day, a bull-necked, stubby man who was leaning over a gate against a background of bright green barley.

"Good morning to you, Wilberforce. Your barley's looking uncommonly well."

"Beautiful, Sir Richard, beautiful. Some grumbles, but not me, Sir Richard, not me. May was bad for fruit with all that hail we had. But the crops didn't suffer. Will you be passing by the farm, Sir Richard?"

"Not this morning, Wilberforce. I'm taking my annual ride round the estate. You know my old custom."

"None better, Sir Richard. And what a one you be for keeping up old customs, if you'll permit the liberty of the observation, Sir Richard. And glad I am for one to have such a landlord in these days when Jack thinks himself so good as his master. And how's Mr. John, Sir Richard?"

"Mr. John is well, very well. He hopes to be quartered at Aldershot presently, when we may expect to see something of him."

"It'll be a grand day for Barton Flowers when the village turns out to see the conquering hero come. Mr. John must have been proud when Her Majesty pinned on the Victoria Cross with her own hands at Buckingham Palace the other day. But, as I said to all of 'em, Her Majesty must have been proud of Mr. John when she were a-pinning of it on."

"Yes, I believe he deserved his honor," said the father, trying to look unconcerned. "Of course you saw the little account of it in the newspaper?"

Farmer Wilberforce gave his landlord the pleasure of supposing that he had not yet read the account, whereupon Sir Richard took a cutting from his waistcoat pocket and read aloud as follows:

Lieutenant (now Captain) John Flower, Royal Artillery.

Date of act of bravery, 5th November, 1854.

For having at the Battle of Inkerman personally attacked three Russians, and, with the gunners of his Division of the battery, prevented the Russians from doing mischief to the guns which they had surrounded.

Part of a regiment of English infantry had previously retired through the battery in front of this body of Russians.

"He had to wait a long time for his deed to be recognized," said the father, replacing the slip of paper in his pocket with a sigh of satisfaction.

"Good morning to you, Wilberforce. I mustn't stay gossiping here any longer. I've a good many miles in front of me, you know."

Sir Richard rode on, his mind full of his elder son's valor. He should be thinking about marriage, though. It was time to see a grandson at the Hall. One was apt to forget how fast the years were going by. How old was John now? Thirty. So he was, by gad, thirty. Yes, he must be getting married. Not much difficulty about that, the proud father laughed to himself. Handsome, brave, the heir to Barton Flowers! It was right that he should take his profession seriously, but after the Crimea and the Mutiny he could claim to have served his country well, could afford to sell out and prepare himself to administer the property he would one day inherit. One day . . . but not just yet. "No, not just yet," Sir Richard murmured, gripping the flanks of the gray horse tightly in pride of his own strength. And perhaps at this moment when the electric telegram was almost daily bringing news of French victories in Italy, and when that rascal Napoleon might be forming who knows what schemes to invade England, yes, perhaps at this moment, Captain John Flower should stick to his guns. Still, he would talk to his wife about the boy's marriage. He hoped that when he arrived home again he should find that headache sufficiently improved to let her discuss the subject with keenness and intelligence. The right plan was to invite some eligible young women to visit

the Hall during John's next furlough, and if luck should station him at Aldershot to take care that whenever he drove over to Barton he should find an attraction at home. Luckily there were plenty of eligible young women in the neighborhood. Sir Richard was enumerating the possible wives for his heir when the disquieting thought occurred to him that John, like his father before him, might look beyond Hampshire for a wife. Not that for a single moment he had regretted his own choice; but what might be done once with success might end in disaster if fortune were tempted again. Anybody who had been made aware of Sir Richard's thoughts at this moment might have been pardoned for supposing that he had found a wife of beauty, merit, and ability in a lower stratum of society. As a matter of fact, the present Lady Flower was the daughter of one of Wellington's most gallant officers and a French lady of rank whose father had taken refuge from the Terror in England, where he had preferred to remain during the Napoleonic tyranny. It was the French blood that made Sir Richard feel he was committing a breach of tradition in marrying Miss Helen Baxter. To have introduced French blood into the Flowers, notwithstanding the pride of the family in their Norman origin, still seemed to him an astonishing piece of audacity; and even now he could shudder to think what his father would have said, had his father been alive when he married. Yet his wedded life had been one of un-

broken happiness, and Helen had not betrayed the least sign of her mixed origin unless perhaps in an incurable propensity to succumb to violent headaches, which she dignified, or as her husband preferred to think, Frenchified by calling migraines. The old family doctor attributed them to nerves, and nerves, Sir Richard felt, were French, not English, so that if Doctor Wilkinson was right, the headaches must have been inherited from her French mother. There was nothing of the Frenchman in the elder son John. He never had a headache in his life, and he had won the Victoria Cross. English to the backbone was John. But Edward . . . ?

Sir Richard, who had been trotting gaily along his boundaries, pulled up his horse to a walk, because the personality and character of his younger son perplexed him. Edward had headaches, was prone to day-dreaming, and at twenty-eight showed no sign of making any progress at the Bar, to which without apparently the slightest taste for a legal career he had recently been called. Headaches, day-dreams, instability, these were not English qualities. What had Edward been doing down at home all the summer? How could he expect to be a successful barrister if he left his chambers in Pump Court to take care of themselves? If John had been a barrister, he would have made his mark by now. Yet Edward had been endowed with more brains than John. John was diligent, determined; but Edward had the brains. It had been the ancient custom of the

Flowers to send the eldest son to Winchester, the others to Eton. Sir Richard, who was a Wykhamist, had broken the tradition by sending John to Eton and Edward to Winchester, partly because he thought that Winchester would eradicate more sternly any French symptoms that appeared in Edward, partly because he believed that what was known as cleverness in a boy would receive more encouragement at the older foundation. But Edward had been a disappointment. His career at Winchester had been undistinguished, and he had gone down from New College without taking a degree. That was the moment when his father should have been firm with him, when he should have insisted upon his making his own way in the world without parental assistance. But Helen had intervened, and she intervened so rarely that when she did her husband was always defeated. Edward had expressed a half-hearted desire to read for the Bar, and he had allowed himself to be persuaded into making the necessary allowance. What was the result? Edward at twenty-eight as little able to provide for himself as he was at eight! It had been all very well for his mother to plead for his company over long months at Barton to console her for the absence of her elder son first in the Crimea and then in India. But John had been back a year now, and Edward spent more time than ever at home. Confound it, the problem of Edward's future was

spoiling the day, and in a burst of irritation the baronet spurred his horse to a canter.

At this point the boundary of Sir Richard's estate might have been the subject of litigation had there been enough people interested to litigate. It was the old dispute over common land which had been gradually enclosed by the lord of the manor. In this case the issue was complicated by the fact that the head of the Flowers was as such himself a commoner, and it was difficult to prove that a commoner had no right to plant beechwoods if he was so minded. This had been the Flower method of encroachment. At this date there were only three other families of commoners left, and inasmuch as these gained a miserable livelihood by poaching Sir Richard's coverts rather than by pasturing a few scrawny geese, there was no doubt that before long the landlord would succeed in fixing his boundary on the far side of the common. At present the common extended for a mile, a narrow strip of coarse grass land two hundred yards wide at its greatest breadth along the baronet's dark beechwoods. Beyond the common the railway cut its track through the meadows of another landowner, and Sir Richard laughed to think how twenty years ago he had refused to let the line run through his land.

"That's the way good estates are ruined," he thought complacently, urging his horse from a canter to a gallop.

The wild commoners came out from their hovels to stare at him as he flew past, and congratulated themselves that he had not noticed how much turf in excess of their allowance had recently been cut.

At the end of the gallop Sir Richard reined in his horse to a walk that he might move slowly and admiringly through a plantation of larches he had put in ten years ago, which now in its symmetry and silence impressed him as a painter might be impressed by the beauty of an early work he had forgotten. Sir Richard regretted that he had not made a similar plantation near the Hall, so that his wife might enjoy walking upon this pale grass where the sun shone with so dim and so diffused a light. He was convinced that the experience would appeal to that romantic side of her character which expressed itself in migraines. Yes, it was a pity he had not thought of planting another within access of the Hall. He was now in the most remote corner of his demesne, and it would be difficult to drive her to this place without considerable discomfort. This plantation must be making a fine screen for old Taylor's orchard by now, thought Sir Richard. The old man had grumbled when first his landlord had insisted upon afforesting that useless field, covered with thistles and ragwort; he would admit now that his landlord had been right. But the old man was always grumbling. No doubt if he met him today he would be full of woe over the thunder and hail of last month, vowing that none of his blossom

had set and that the season would be a dead loss in consequence. How different from Wilberforce, who had recognized most sensibly the promise of the arable crops! The fact of it was, old Taylor was growing too old for the responsibility of a large farm. Of course he had not the slightest intention of turning him out, but he did wish that old Taylor showed more signs of appreciating his landlord's consideration. That was the trouble with people, Sir Richard sighed to himself, one did all that was possible for them and received nothing in return. If only some of the tenants who grumbled at the least delay in carrying out necessary repairs would try to understand the point of view of the landlord. Nowadays people only tried to understand their own point of view. Yes, the age was degenerating, humanity was not what it was.

The prey of these pessimistic reflections, Sir Richard had allowed the horse to take his own pace; the progress had been slow and silent; and when the long central aisle of the plantation made an abrupt curve at its conclusion Sir Richard found himself in old Taylor's orchard so suddenly that he had to dismount in a hurry to save his silk hat from being knocked off by the boughs of the apple trees. As his foot touched the ground, he saw in a sun-flecked space about eighty yards from where he was standing two figures disengage from a close embrace. Sir Richard recognized from the color of her auburn hair old Taylor's granddaughter, Elizabeth, and

he was on the verge of a smile for youth and love in the summer time when he perceived that the man was his own son, Edward. He raised his riding-crop with a gesture of rage, while the lovers as if even a moment's separation were bitter as death clung together in a fresh embrace, standing heedless of all except their love, heedless of the young apples that fell from time to time from every tree, heedless of the noise Sir Richard's horse made in cropping the tender grass, heedless of Sir Richard's foot stamped upon the ground in anger, nor even looking round when he jerked his horse's bridle, remounted, and galloped back the way he had come down the long central aisle between the larches.

"The damned philandering puppy," he muttered to himself, as he came out from the plantation and set the gray to gallop more swiftly than before over the common land. He paid no attention to the wild commoners, who seeing the baronet return at this furious pace supposed that he had been made aware of their depredations upon the turf and ran to hide from his wrath in the dark bordering beeches. He paid no attention to the geese that flapped across his path except to give the gelding a cruel jab when he swerved in his stride. It was barely two o'clock when Sir Richard reached the Hall, having for the first time in thirty-five years failed at his yearly task of riding round the confines of his ten thousand acres. So deeply enraged was he with his son's conduct that he neither sent

up to warn his wife of his early return nor even inquired after her headache. He shut himself in his big library, pacing up and down among the rows of books, the titles of which wrote themselves upon his mind more rapidly but perhaps not less intelligibly than they had written themselves on the minds of generations of Flowers. Sir Richard glared at the busts of poets, orators, and philosophers posed with such unconcern, with such coolness and such contempt above the cornice of the shelves. If Homer, Demosthenes and Plato had not been out of reach, the baronet would have swept them from their perch to the ground. Instead he pulled the bell rope violently.

"When Mr. Edward comes in," he told the butler, "I wish to see him at once."

"Very good, Sir Richard," said the butler apprehensively, and as the old man went out of the library Sir Richard wondered if his son's conduct was already a topic in the steward's room and servants' hall. In the middle of his rage there was a tap at the door, and his wife entered to a gruff summons. Lady Flower was a small, dainty woman whose smallness and daintiness was accentuated by the vast crinolines of the moment. Although she was almost fifty, her black hair lacked the faintest film of gray, her ivory skin showed few lines. To Sir Richard she seemed the same as when thirty-one years ago he had married her. She never came into a room but his mind went back to the first sight

of her dressed in a short flounced skirt with her black hair tied high with roses and ribands; and it seemed not she but her clothes which had grown older and more stately with years.

"My dear, what is the matter?" she asked. "What has upset you?"

The distressed father poured out his tale.

"But aren't you taking it all too seriously?" his wife suggested. "Edward has only found a Graziella at Barton. *Il y a toujours des petits amoureux . . .*"

"For God's sake don't talk French!" Sir Richard burst in. "There's nothing like French for giving an unpleasant turn to the conversation."

"It was tactless of me," she apologized, seating herself in a high-backed chair where she looked as tranquil and as much assured as one of the classic busts eyeing infinity above the books. "But seriously the Taylor girl is a pretty little thing, and if Edward is not imprudent there is most surely no harm in a few kisses."

"Helen, your remarks border on cynicism," said Sir Richard. "I know that you have always maintained your right to discuss matters which in England I think we have reason in not encouraging women to discuss; but really when your advanced views are applied to your own children I think it is time for me to protest. After all, if you had a French mother, my dear, you are quite definitely and unmistakably English yourself. But please do not

let us cover up Edward's behavior with side issues. You know how much I have deplored his laziness, how much I have objected to his spending most of his time here, and how necessary it is for him as a younger son to supplement with a profession any allowance I am able to give him in the future from my own savings. I repeat, you know all this, and yet when I discover that the reason for his continually living with his parents is not the pleasure of their society, but a low passion for the granddaughter of one of his father's tenants, it becomes obvious that Edward's behavior can no longer be tolerated. Of course he has headaches if he behaves like this," Sir Richard went on indignantly. "Of course he finds the air of Pump Court too stuffy in June. You must remember, my dear, that Edward is twenty-eight. We are not discussing the calf love of a schoolboy."

"Well, all I beg is that you will handle him tactfully," said Lady Flower. "Now, if I could only persuade you to let me talk to him . . ."

"Certainly not. On such a subject most certainly not," Sir Richard shouted.

"But if you jump down his throat and treat him like a schoolboy, he may do something really serious." She paused to sniff a silver vinaigrette, while the suggestion buried itself like an arrow in the heavy ground of her husband's mind.

"Really serious?" he echoed in a moment's perplexity. "Good God! you are not suggesting that

he might want to marry her? That would indeed be the end of everything."

"That is precisely what I am trying to tell you," said his wife. "That is why I am trying to hint that you should not take too high a moral tone."

"Good heavens, my dear, what outrageous remarks you do make. And yet on this occasion I really believe you are justified in making them."

The baronet sank down into a chair opposite his wife and allowed her to lean over and pat his cheek as if he were a disconsolate boy.

"Don't you think it would be wiser for me to carry through this scene?" she pressed.

He waved the suggestion aside. "No, no, my dear. I appreciate your desire to spare me pain, but what I have to say to Edward must be said as from a man to a man. Hark! I hear his horse coming up the drive. Leave us together, my dear, leave us, I beg you . . ."

Lady Flower hesitated for one moment longer, but perceiving that her husband was not to be moved from his resolve, acquitted herself of all responsibility with a gesture of her white hands, and without a backward glance of entreaty floated from the room.

Edward Flower resembled his mother in features and complexion, but in figure he was tall and slim like his father. He seemed to divine that the interview to which he had been summoned was likely to be disagreeable, for he waited by the door of the

library when he had closed it behind him as if he hoped that he had made a mistake in thus intruding.

"Bates told me you wished to speak to me, sir."

"I did. I do. Don't let us beat about the bush. And come into the room! I can't shout what I have to say."

However discreetly hushed the baronet's voice was going to be when he attacked his son upon the situation in Taylor's orchard, it was loud enough at present.

"I am at your service, sir," said Edward quietly, taking the chair in which a few minutes ago his mother had been sitting.

"I started out this morning to ride round the estate," Sir Richard began. "On my way I passed by Taylor's orchard." He paused with a stern glance at his son. "Well, sir?" he demanded.

"And I'm glad you did, papa," said Edward eagerly. The character of this interview drove him back unconsciously to childhood's manner of address.

"You're glad I did?" the baronet echoed. "By gad, sir, you're a cooler hand at this game than I gave you credit for. I'm thankful I did not allow your mother to speak to you on this subject."

"Did my mother wish to speak to me?" Edward broke in. "Ah, she would understand, and I fear that you, sir, may be prejudiced by the humble station of the dear girl I am going to marry."

"Marry!" the baronet shouted. "This is not a

moment for levity, sir. I sent for you to say that I won't have you philandering with the females on my estate. You know I disapprove of the manner you idle away your time here when you should be working at your profession. But if you do stay here, by God you shall stay here like a gentleman and a Flower, with respect for the domestic happiness of your father's tenants. We've never yet had a scandal of that kind in our family, and if my son brings such a scandal about I'll disown him."

"I have already told you, sir, that the young woman will shortly become my wife. There is no question of scandal. I love her passionately, devotedly. She gives me all and more in return. She is a modest and beautiful girl. I am old enough to know my own mind. I am sorry to seem disrespectful, sir, but nothing that you can say will alter my resolve."

"I'll disinherit you."

"I must put up with that."

"I'll disown you. You shall never cross the threshold of this house again."

"I must put up even with that," said Edward sadly.

"Thank God I have another son who would never disgrace his father and his father's name thus."

"I know that I have been a disappointment to you, sir; but this is not the moment to make excuses for my carelessness in the past nor to try your patience with promises of reform in the future. I firmly

believe that marriage with Elizabeth Taylor will give me that very stability and perseverance in which I have hitherto shown myself so lacking. If you had evinced less anger at my decision, I should have enlarged upon this benefit to my character; but in your present mood I am conscious that anything I say will only serve to enrage you against me more than ever. Luckily I am not your heir, and my brother, as you justly observe, will know better than I how to uphold the honor of your house—since you have disowned me, I hesitate to say *our* house. Believe me, my dear, dear father, when I say that only the assurance of my whole life's happiness depending upon my marriage with Elizabeth keeps me from obeying your wishes. There is nothing to add except my deep regret for the secrecy I have maintained throughout. I can assure you that in acting in what may seem to you an underhand manner I was endeavoring to spare you pain, so that when the secret had to come out, which would have been to-morrow, for it is to-morrow that we are to be married, you would have been spared the annoyance of contesting a situation which was a *fait accompli.*"

"Damn it, don't talk French, and get out of my sight," Sir Richard shouted, louder than he had shouted yet, for his son's long speech had given his rage time to seethe in his breast, and it now burst forth with double volume.

Edward bowed his head and rising from his chair

went gloomily from the room. He found his mother standing in the corridor outside, and at a signal he followed her upstairs to her boudoir.

Edward contrasted his mother's calm with his father's fury, and yet when she sat upright on a wide stool, composing her full skirts of amber sarsanet with hands that seemed incredibly small against the vast pendulous sleeves from which they emerged, Edward was more uneasy in presence of that calm than when he was being buffeted by his father's storms. There was an ivory polish, an ivory hardness, an ivory resilience about his mother that made his heart beat with a dread of this delicate creature who within his earliest memories had always come to the help of his ineffectiveness, but who now sat regarding him from eyes that seemed as hard as agates.

"Listen, Edward," she said quickly. "I overheard what your father said, and I understand that you have announced your resolve to marry this . . ." Lady Flower paused for a second as if she were pondering the effect upon her son of describing the young woman too brutally . . . "this pretty country girl," she continued, sure now of the key in which her persuasion should be played, a key of light irony, of compassionate ridicule which must bring the sensitive Edward to a perception of the impossibility of what he was proposing. "I think I have seen her once or twice hanging out the clothes or feeding her grandfather's chickens. She has red

hair, has she not? And is she not much freckled?"

"She has glorious hair," Edward avowed. "And her complexion is perfect."

"Red-headed women usually freckle somewhat easily," said his mother indifferently. "But let that pass, we will admit her beauty. Personally I distrust red-haired women. There is something of the fox . . ."

Lady Flower broke off to shrug her shoulders in distaste.

"I should hardly describe her hair as red myself," Edward said. "It has reddish tints, but . . ."

"My dear boy, you are not proposing to paint this young woman; you are proposing to marry her. When your father came home furious because he had seen you kissing her on a garden-seat or some such romantic spot, I took your part. Indeed, your father was shocked at my inability to see much harm in kissing a pretty village maiden. But marriage, ah, *par example, mais ça c'est un peu fort, tu sais,* Have you really considered what it will mean in a few years' time when your Graziella coarsens? You will have to earn your own living, for I know your father well enough to be sure that if you do marry this girl he will keep his word and cut you off. That means that you will not have the leisure to educate her, that you will be dragged down to her level, that you will . . ."

"Please, mamma, please I beg you not to say any more. My mind is made up, and if I have to re-

nounce my family I want to leave you without the least bitterness. I will not hear a word against Elizabeth. I adore her."

"And where will you live?" his mother inquired, biting her lips.

"I am going to ask her grandfather if he will take me on at his farm."

"You are going to live within a few miles of us as a farm hand?"

"I shall be happy," said Edward, miserably aware of his mother's contempt.

"I have always defended you until now. But such . . . such . . . Oh, I have no word for such a despicable suggestion. I have finished with you, Edward. I almost wish I could shout as loudly as your father to tell you how completely I despise you. Go to that minx, who in a year will despise you as much as I do, and who will play you false with the first handsome plowboy she meets. And you'll deserve it, you weakling!"

Edward rushed from his mother's room, and when he had packed his possessions went to Bates, the old butler, and asked him for the servants' cart to take his luggage to Long Orchard Farm. His mother's last speech had made much easier the task of cutting himself off from his family, and when he set out down the drive he had not one regret for what he was losing. Edward depended much on other people, and now that one of those on whom he had most securely depended had let him fall, he clung

more closely to the other. Elizabeth had long lamented the worry she was likely to prove to him when his family was informed of the marriage, and he was glad now to be able to meet her before the day with the news that he owned no family except hers. How surprised she would be to see him again so soon, for they had just lived through that passionate farewell until they should meet to-morrow morning at the door of the church. A misgiving came over Edward. What if Elizabeth should be so much distressed by the news of the breach that she should not keep her word? Was it wise in any case to upset her on the eve of the wedding? Let her sleep to-night, or if she lay awake on this vigil let her thoughts be serene as the summer night and radiant as the summer dawn. He would beg a night's lodging from the Vicar, who was already so deep in Sir Richard's bad graces that one more act of defiance could not add to his offense.

Edward found his friend the Vicar, an old Tractarian who had somehow eluded Sir Richard's Protestant zeal and been presented to the living of Barton Flowers, sympathetic and encouraging. The old man sat in his dusty room amid a chaos of theological tomes and held forth upon the sacramental wonder of marriage, reaching from time to time for a book from his shelves, usually the work of some Anglo-Catholic divine of the seventeenth century, in whose sonorous periods human love was exalted and sanctified and whose dying cadences

showed forth mortality in the image of Almighty God.

"Marriage is too sacred a rite to be regulated by worldly considerations," the priest said. "You are justified by your singleness of purpose. You have acted loyally to the woman of your choice. You have nothing to reproach yourself for."

Edward had been glad to avail himself of the Vicar's help to assure Elizabeth that she was not outraging decency by marrying him; but he had never occupied his mind with the demands of religion, and only now for the first time he was deeply impressed by a sudden consciousness of what a weight of moral and spiritual support stood behind him in what he was about to do. From that moment he looked at religion with new eyes, apprehending in it the possibility of so crystallizing his indeterminate aspirations as even at this late hour of youth to do something and be somebody. He went up to bed in a glow of ambition that lighted his spirit, even as the candle lighted the dark corridors and stairways of the Vicarage.

Edward slept tranquilly, and in the morning at eight o'clock he was married to Elizabeth Taylor, with nobody except her grandfather and a couple of farm hands to hear their whispers of eternal fidelity, their murmured promises to have and to hold and to cherish until death. There was no shouting when they came out arm-in-arm from the church; there was nothing except the peace of a mid-

summer morning, the fragrance of long grass in the churchyard, the hum of bees in the limes, and in the distance a sound of lowing cattle.

The bride and bridegroom had not planned to spend their honeymoon elsewhere; indeed, they had both been so much preoccupied with the complications arising out of their simple action that they had thought of nothing beyond the achievement of the wedding. When old James Taylor asked them where they intended to pass the night, neither of them could reply for the moment. At length Edward spoke:

"I have to explain, Mr. Taylor, that yesterday I had a very unpleasant scene with Sir Richard, who ordered me out of his house forever."

"A' look now, that's Sir Richard sure enough," the old man nodded. "The most unreasonable man that ever owned an acre. Well, I suppose you'd better bide here."

Edward explained his project to stay on and help with the farm work, at which the old man chuckled.

"You can stay so long as you will, but I don't reckon you'll be much use on the farm. What's Lizzie say to it?"

Elizabeth had no words to say, but worlds to look, and since all her worlds were entirely populated by Edwards, she showed plainly that she approved of anything Edward proposed to do.

" 'Tis no use at all to look for help from a maid, once she be tied up," the old man chuckled. "I sup-

pose I might soberly consider myself a fool to give her to you. But give her I have. You see, Mr. Edward, you was all her fancy, and ever since my boy died, her fancy has always been mine. He was a good lad. I miss him sorely now, especially come seed-time. And couldn't he broadcast a field of oats! Oh dear, oh dear, none like him! Foxtail oats was his favorites, and wouldn't they come up thick from his sowing! But, darn'ee, do you think the young chaps can sow like that now? They cannot!"

"I'm going to have a good try," Edward vowed.

"A' look now, that's the way to talk, I'm bothered if it isn't," the old man exclaimed, pretending to be much impressed, while his blue eyes twinkled like the sea on a fine morning.

They had reached the farmhouse by now, and when old James had hung his big beaver hat on a peg they sat down to the wedding breakfast, at which the presence of the Vicar compelled a demeanor that might otherwise have been wanting, because old James on such occasions was apt to indulge in bucolic freedom of speech.

"But when parson's there," he said afterwards, "I always sits so dumb as a rook in a pie. It comes over me to say summat, and then I catches parson's eye and back the wicked words go into my mouth like rabbits. He's a good man is parson, but he surely lays on me like snow in a ditch. Well, now, go out into the fields and lanes and enjoy this fine

summer-time, you two. We can talk about Sir Richard and such sober topics to-morrow. Come, give I a kiss, my maid. You're looking sweet as laylock in a garden."

Edward would not let Elizabeth torment herself about the future, and she, so deep in love, could not fret for long with Edward hers now whatever happened . . . hers . . . ah, could he but know how completely hers. . . .

"Edward, my own, are you sure you love me as much, now that we are husband and wife?"

She clung to him in a self-inflicted agony of doubt, knowing full well that in a moment it would be turned to the warmth of a delicious security.

"My foolish Lizzie," he murmured, "I love you a thousand times more."

"But you seem sad sometimes, as if you half regretted what you had done."

"I am not sad, my dearest. If I seem serious, it is because I am awed by the knowledge that you are mine."

"Oh, and I am yours, I am indeed yours."

Edward looked into her burning brown eyes that were unlike any other brown eyes he had ever seen, because they caught somehow the hues and shadows of her deep auburn hair, as a woodland pool appears stained with autumn like the trees above.

"Your eyes," he murmured, and he felt a longing to drown within their deeps.

"Do you like my eyes?"

"Elizabeth! You vain, vain Elizabeth!"

They kissed, while a summer wind sang its small song, its intimate and idle song among the grasses at their feet.

"Hark to the little wind," said Edward. "Of what does it remind you?"

"Only of summer," she whispered.

"Don't you think it is like a child singing to herself while she plays alone with her toys?"

"What funny fancies you have, Edward."

A sudden comprehension of what might be seized him in a rapture, and he clasped his Elizabeth closer.

"Can you not tell me of what I am thinking?" he whispered.

She raised her eyes slowly, divined the thought that was beating from his heart into hers, blushed as red as her own red heart which now beat as fast as his, buried her face for a moment in his breast, then looked up quickly and for answer gave him her lips.

The moths were dancing over the petunias, when the lovers came home to the farm.

"But you'll never have such another day," said old James. "And if you've missed your tea, you can make up for it with supper. But as for me, I'm going to bed."

He lighted his candle and stumped upstairs, chuckling to himself. On the landing he paused and leaning over the balustrade called down:

"And if you miss your breakfast, you can make up for it with dinner."

They could hear him still chuckling to himself long after he had closed his bedroom door.

"You know," said Elizabeth, "if anybody didn't know it was grandfather laughing to himself, they'd surely think it was owls in the roof."

They sat for a while talking about foolish things like that, and then they too went upstairs. Through the open lattices of their room the perfume of the night-scented stocks came up from the garden. Edward saw with amazement that Elizabeth's hair reached almost to her feet, and he thought of his mother's remark yesterday. "That little red-haired girl!" Why, there never was such hair before. Too soon the moment came to put out the candle and lose those glinting locks. While the odor of the wick slowly faded upon the cool fragrance blown in upon them by the night, Edward lay with the last vision of Elizabeth upon his inner eye. Then turning he clasped her in his arms, and she with all her being leapt to his as a wave to the shore.

There was no moon that night, but in every lattice a star or two twinkled, and in the starshine Elizabeth lay beside him like a warm shadow.

"Are you happy, my darling?"

"Very, very happy."

Edward could not sleep. He did not want to sleep. He wished to stay forever like this, with her hair about his face. Dawn was on the panes,

and the sparrows were stirring in the eaves. How still she lay, how fast she slept! He bent over to kiss her eyelids. She stirred slightly and put out her hand, clasping his and murmuring a faint endearment, an echo from her dreams. The first rays of the sun shone through upon the bed. Her lips in sleep were very crimson, and she woke up when he kissed them.

"Are you happy, my darling?"

"Very, very happy."

They lay for a long while in each other's arms while the sun climbed higher, the bland five o'clock sun of June.

"I must start farming to-day," Edward declared. "They'll be cutting the hay, I fancy."

"While the sun shines," she whispered, smiling.

"My lovely one, my lovely one," he breathed.

Edward was not given much time to test his willingness or ability as a farmer, because as soon as the hay had been carried old James Taylor was given notice by Sir Richard Flower to quit the farm at Ladyday. He went up to the Hall to try to see his father and find out if the notice would be rescinded should he himself give an undertaking to leave the neighborhood. Sir Richard, however, declined to see his son, and that evening he sent him his allowance for the next quarter with the intimation that this was the last money he would ever receive from his father. When the rent of his chambers and

some outstanding debts in London had been paid and his few possessions sold, Edward found himself with not much more than one hundred and fifty pounds and without any prospect of earning a living. It had never occurred to him that his father would take what he thought so mean a revenge on his wife's grandfather, and he could not help feeling that at the back of Sir Richard's action was a desire to get rid of the old man who, as Edward knew, he considered an unprofitable tenant. James accepted his notice with admirable calm and dignity. He had not a word of reproach for Edward or Elizabeth, and upon his landlord's behavior his only comment was:

"It was always in my mind that he would give me notice one day. Ever since I argued the point with him over that larch plantation which I said was spoiling good grazing he had it in his heart to get rid of I. He were ashamed for a long time. And I held the farm for thirty years, and my father before me twenty-five years, and his father before that thirty-two years."

Edward was in despair; but neither old James nor Elizabeth would hear of his reproaching himself.

"You came like an honest man," said James, "not gallivanting round as one of the gentry might. That's good enough for I, and that's good enough for she. Come Lammas I shall be seventy, which is a late age for making a long journey unless it be that powerful long journey out of this world into

the next. My brother Henry set out forty-three years ago for Australia, and I've only heard from him once, and that was Christmas two years ago. I put off answering the letter, for I write a very crooked hand and was never one for letters. Get the ink-horn, Lizzie. By God A'mighty, I'll write him now and say we'll pay him a visit in the spring of the year. I still have a pretty hand wi' sheep, and I reckon Henry will find us all a job."

"Why, that's the very thing," cried Edward. "Emigration! What a fool I was not to have thought of it myself."

Old James wrote a letter to his brother, who was evidently a squatter of considerable affluence and who, judging by the cordial tone of the only letter he had written, would be glad in his old age, being a childless widower, to welcome his kinsfolk from England. It was decided to give up the farm at Christmas and to sail as early as possible in the New Year. Fortune was kind up to the point of granting old James a good harvest that season, and although the new tenant, Farmer Wilberforce, did not pay as he ought to have paid for the live and dead stock, James scraped together enough to enable the three of them to equip themselves for a long journey and avoid the steerage. It became important to start as early as possible in the New Year, because Elizabeth was with child, and it was hoped to leave England in time to avoid childbirth on the high seas. Edward was painfully conscious of being

able to do very little to help old James, and he tried to console himself with the belief that once ashore in Australia he would by his energy make amends for his present helplessness. Places were secured in the second class of the *Mariana,* a ship of 1,374 tons, which was due to sail from Liverpool in the first week of January; but on the night before her departure, when all on board were making merry to the strains of an emigrant fiddler and an emigrant piper, an alarm of fire was raised. There was plenty of help at hand from the crowded shipping of the Mersey; the passengers with their luggage were taken off by steam-tugs and boats; and the vessel was run ashore, where when the tide left her high and dry she was gutted by the flames.

Elizabeth bore the terrifying experience with fortitude, and when the shipping agents in Liverpool told them of a ship sailing from London within a few days she was not backward in urging her husband and grandfather to make every effort to obtain a passage. Nevertheless, the nervous tension to which she had been exposed proved too much for her, and even before the train journey was accomplished her travail began prematurely. There was no time to search for comfortable lodgings. The first rooms they found in Pomona Terrace, a dreary by-street off the Euston Road, had to serve their need, and while the landlady, a good-natured, grubby Irishwoman, helped Elizabeth to bed, Edward

rushed out into the wet foggy night to summon a doctor.

In a crescent of decaying houses he soon perceived like rubies on the murky air the lamps of two doctors adjacent. Had his need been less urgent, such a juxtaposition would have presented an insoluble problem to Edward whose attitude to life was one long hesitation between his right and his left. As it was, he hurried up the first pair of steps and was on the point of pulling the bell, when through a broken slat of the Venetian blinds he saw the occupant of the room thus revealed pour himself out a very generous allowance of whisky or brandy from a dusty decanter unsteadily held in a dirty hand. He paused with his fingers on the knob of the bell while the occupant of the gas-lit room held the decanter in mid-air, listening. The face with its expression of interrupted desire and expectant cunning was so repulsive that Edward was horrified at the idea of such a creature's attending upon his beloved Elizabeth, and in a moment he had put his leg over the low stone parapet that divided the steps of one doctor from the steps of the other.

"Yes," the maid told him, "Dr. Harrison is in."

Edward explained the case to the doctor, while the latter packed his bag with various instruments, and so much excited was he that he could hardly refrain from plucking at the doctor's sleeve when they were hurrying back through the fog to the lodgings in Pomona Terrace. Dr. Harrison was a young

man, scarcely more than thirty, whose manner carried such assurance that Edward was able to feel that his choice had been the right one. When they reached the house the doctor was at once taken upstairs, while Edward, on the suggestion of Mrs. Gallagher, accommodated himself in the kitchen. Here he found old James Taylor on one side of the range talking of agriculture to Mr. Gallagher, a workman in the employ of one of the great railway companies, who was displaying his agreement or disagreement with, his interest in or boredom at the farmer's observations only by the way he sucked at his clay pipe. For an Irishman he was strangely taciturn. From time to time slatternly young women passed through; but whether they were the daughters or servants of the Gallaghers or lodgers in the house, there was no telling. Though Edward took a chair next old Taylor, his thoughts were upstairs, and the old man's lecture on clovers meant as little to him as the chirping of the crickets in the walls of the house. His anxiety over Elizabeth was so sharp that the incongruity of his surroundings never struck him. His whole being was too much involved with his wife's for what is called reality to affect him more nearly than might the incidents of a dream. That he should share a bedroom with old Taylor, that he should find himself deferring to a Gallagher, that he should be expected to take his place at an ill-laid table and eat the malodorous mess there set down by a slut with grimy hands made

no impression upon Edward. Had his mother floated into this squalid kitchen and pointed a delicate finger in scorn at his surroundings, he would not have listened one whit less intensely for the slightest sound from above. Whatever disgusted him in Pomona Terrace took its place in the general purgatory of deprivation of the sight of Elizabeth, and the farthest that his mind wandered from that room upstairs was to that broken slat in the Venetian blinds through which he had seen that drunken doctor's face. Thank God he had! Thank God!

A long time passed. Mr. Gallagher had fallen asleep and was snoring loudly. Old Taylor was asleep too, his jaw dropped upon his chest, his whole aspect senility incarnate. The restless slatterns no longer moved in and out with unwashed dishes and bawdy gigglings.

Now the crickets were silent in the glooms; Gallagher had ceased to snore; there was no sound except an occasional cough from the subsiding fire. So silent was it that Edward could hear his watch ticking with what seemed a terrible rapidity in the pocket of his waistcoat. At last the doctor put his head round the door and beckoned. Edward was beside him in a moment, gasping forth his alarms.

"She's not dead? Why didn't you call me sooner?"

The doctor gripped Edward's forearm and bade him pull himself together. That grip in conjunction with the cold air of the passage kept Edward

from breaking down. He compelled himself to follow what the doctor with a good deal of technical detail was telling him about Elizabeth's condition. "And so it may be impossible to save the lives of both," the doctor was murmuring. "However, as I was saying, there is no need to decide yet, and I am expecting a new instrument to-morrow, which may do away with the necessity of such a painful decision. I have sent word to have any parcel which arrives for me brought here immediately."

"Decision?" Edward repeated. "What decision do you mean?"

"Whether we save the life of the mother or the child?"

"Are you drunk or mad?" Edward shouted. "Why, rather than she should suffer an instant's pain I would have the child cut to pieces. Decision! I believe you're as drunk as that other fellow next door."

The young doctor gazed at Edward in astonishment, for he had heard nothing of the reason for choosing him in preference to his neighbor.

"I was bound to give you the opportunity of deciding," he explained. "Naturally I did not for a moment expect you to give any other answer but the one you have given. I'm sorry to have upset you like this. If I may offer you some sound advice, I should recommend your staying quietly in the kitchen. It would be better, of course, if you could manage to lie down and sleep for a while;

but I can understand that you are too anxious for that. You must not work yourself up into a state of mind. There is no immediate cause for anxiety. No, certainly no immediate cause."

Edward allowed the doctor to steer him back into the kitchen where their entrance roused old James Taylor and Mr. Gallagher, both of whom with loud yawns declared their intention of going to bed. Soon Edward was left alone, for Dr. Harrison went back to his patient, and he settled himself down to solitary meditation by what was left of the dead fire in the still fairly warm grate.

It was easy, thought Edward, very easy for that young dotor to talk about childbirth as if it were nothing more than buying a doll in a shop. Doctors soon began to lose their sense of the soul in their familiarity with the body. What did a man like that know about the great mystery of human love? Edward's mind went back to his talk with the Vicar of Barton Flowers on the vigil of his wedding; and now thinking over his brief married life with Elizabeth he apprehended all the truth of what the parson had said. He remembered how much the conversation had elated him at the time and how he had felt an impulse to submit himself to the promptings of what the Vicar had called the Grace of the Holy Spirit. That impulse like so many of them, alas, had gone the way of the rest, had been allowed to expire when the enthusiasm of thought demanded the breath of action to endure. Edward vowed that

this time if Elizabeth's life should be granted to him he really would . . . what? "I really will grapple with life," he promised to that nebulous emanation of celestial magic which the ordinary man calls God. "Before the sun rises to-morrow morning I may be a father. I shall owe a duty to a human soul which I have brought into the world." Edward discovered with shame that this child, which might even at this moment be uttering its first cry to the darkness of the unimaginable universe around it, had not until this moment presented itself to him as a fact. He regretted now the way he had answered the doctor's question a short while ago. He had been sneering to himself at the doctor's point of view about childbirth; but he should rather have sneered at himself for what he was, a weak and self-indulgent and careless egoist that without foresight and without responsibility might become the parent of a human being from whom in days to come he should expect gratitude, affection, and obedience.

Edward made new vows to that dim God beyond the stars that if he were granted not only the life of his Elizabeth, but also the life of their child, he would devote his future to a worthy fatherhood, that even if himself should fail in his contest with life he would . . . what? Edward's mind wandered already to the agony of his adored wife, and he could not bear to contemplate any future at all until he knew that she was safe.

Safe! The word wrote itself in the cracks of the dingy ceiling, in the pattern of the grimy wall-paper, in the ashes of the dead fire, in the scrolls of iron-work upon the range, in the patchwork hearthrug, in the knots and lines of the kitchen table. Safe! The word acquired such a force and power of its own that Edward almost worshiped it by repeating aloud the mere sound of it in apostrophe after apostrophe of awful contemplation. Safe! He clutched at the S as he would have clutched at a rope to drag himself up from the abyss below. He climbed up the A, up the F, up the E to stand on the high ground above with Elizabeth clasped in his arms . . . with her . . . with his darling . . . safe . . .

Edward fell asleep. At four o'clock Mrs. Gallagher came down to tell him that things were going on as well as could be expected upstairs, recommending him to be off and lie down on his bed like a Christian. The only place where Edward wanted to lie down was on the landing outside the door of Elizabeth's room; but there was still enough left of the younger son of Sir Richard Flower to keep him from making such a proposal to the landlady.

It was like Edward to insist on staying in the kitchen. There was about it the kind of ineffective Quixotry to which he had been addicted all his life. At seven Dr. Harrison came in and made him comparatively happy by asking him to go round to his house, wait for the postal delivery, and bring back

any package that might by good luck be left. The doctor wanted to add that Edward would do well to ask his servant to give him some breakfast, there being little likelihood of his eating any breakfast in Pomona Terrace. On second thoughts, he did not think the suggestion worth making. He felt too much fatigued by his own all-night vigil to argue with an unbalanced fool like this husband. Such was the young doctor's mood on this drear January morning. Edward hurried through the wet twilight, pale, unshaven, his hair and whiskers unkempt, his collar dirty, his clothes frowsy from the kitchen where he had spent the night. At such an hour Manning Crescent looked more dilapidated than on the night before, and the broken slat in the Venetian blinds of the drunken doctor next door gave the last touch of raffish squalor to the row of houses.

No sooner was Edward seated in the doctor's neat consulting-room than he fell into a despair, because he had not seen Elizabeth before he came out. Suppose she were dead when he arrived back? He could hardly stay in the room; the smell of disinfectants here was stifling him with an aroma of death. It was only by clutching the arms of the chair covered with red rep and dinning into his brain the need to wait for that blessed instrument which was so anxiously awaited by the doctor that he was able not to desert his post. He rang for the maid to ask when the parcel delivery might be ex-

pected, and upon her telling him "ten o'clock at the earliest" he groaned aloud.

It was actually eleven o'clock when Edward, after spending hours of uncertainty, ran back to Pomona Terrace with a parcel for Dr. Harrison.

"It has arrived at the very moment I required it," said the doctor, hurrying upstairs without waiting to give Edward a word of hope about his wife's condition beyond his satisfied comment on the arrival of the new instrument.

On the husband left standing in the dim passage of the Gallaghers' lodging-house dawned the apprehension of God's mercy to him in directing his footsteps yesterday evening to where lived probably the only doctor in the neighborhood who would have a chance of saving that beloved woman's life. He fell upon his knees where he stood and prayed that God's mercy should be extended to the fulfillment of all he hoped. Then he went back to the kitchen. At last Mrs. Gallagher entered all smiles.

"You may come up now," she told him. "All's well, praise be to the Holy Mother of God, and you've a girleen."

"A what?" shouted old James Taylor from his chair by the fire.

" 'Tis you that's a great-grandfather, Mr. Taylor," she told the old man.

"A' look now," chuckled old James. "They ought to put I in a show. 'Tis a state of life you can see in rams and bulls when you've a mind, but

darn'ee, a real great-grandfather is summat to stare at even in London."

Edward was kneeling beside Elizabeth before the old man had finished his sentence. The doctor left them together.

"You haven't asked to look at baby," Elizabeth murmured reproachfully. She lifted the bedclothes for a moment, while Edward looked.

"Yours," he murmured.

"Ours," she corrected. "Ours, my dearest."

"But it was you that suffered everything!"

"But you were anxious about me, weren't you, my darling?" she tenderly asked.

"Elizabeth! Elizabeth!" he cried.

She knew how much he too had suffered, and because he did not speak of his emotions she was moved with an immense desire not to let her baby make her careless of her husband. She put out her hand to stroke his head.

"I thought about you all the time," she whispered. "When the pain was worst I kept saying, 'Edward! Edward!' Nothing else. Only that, my darling."

He drew her hands to his lips.

"And what shall she be christened?" the mother asked. "I'd like her to be called Mary," she went on breathlessly. "You wouldn't think that a common name, would you? 'Mary Flower,' I think that's a pretty name."

The doctor came in at this moment to suggest that Edward had stayed long enough for the pres-

ent. The father leant over to kiss the eyes of that pale mother.

"Well, have 'ee seen her?" demanded the great-grandfather when Edward came downstairs. "I suppose it is a girl all right?"

"Mary," said Edward.

"Oh, Mary, is it to be? Well, that's a good downright honest style of name for a girl. Yes, 'tis a name I like very well. And don't you be discouraged, Mr. Edward, if she don't look beautiful all at once. A calf's different. A new-born calf is a pretty sight for any man. So's a chicken fresh from the egg. But a baby is so ugly as a young rook. Oh dear, oh dear, there's few more ugly sights for man to look upon than a new-born baby. Yet I suppose this time come three months we shall all be looking at kangaroos and wobblies, and they're worse by what one reads of 'em."

Old James had got hold of one or two volumes of Antipodean travel, from dipping into which behind a pair of large horn spectacles he had formed a picture of Australia as zoölogically rich as a medieval illuminator's conception of Eden.

Now that Elizabeth's child was safely born, it was imperative to leave England before the money gave out, and berths were secured in the *Wizard Queen,* a 1,000-ton steamer lying in the East India Docks, which was due to sail on February 18th for the port of Sydney. They went on board the preceding afternoon; but remembering their last experience in the

Mariana and with a desire to avert ill-luck they kept themselves out of sight of the other emigrants who, like those on the Mersey, were drowning the sorrow of departure in music and song. As a matter of fact, old James could not resist going up on deck to have a bit of fun, as he called it; but Edward and Elizabeth remained close in their cabin, and did not even emerge for supper.

After supper the strains of music that floated down below became more melancholy, so that Elizabeth shivered. Edward, always solicitous, begged her to tell him what was the matter. Did she feel nervous after that alarming night on the Mersey? Did she regret that she had married him? Was not the baby Mary sleeping soundly in her canvas cot, and was she not so wonderful a being that sighs should be forgotten in the contemplation of the future they two would sacrifice all to achieve for her?

"I was thinking of you, Edward," she said. "I was wondering if I had done wrong in marrying you, so that you have had to leave your family and your country for my sake."

"It is not your fault," Edward exclaimed, "that we are all going to Australia. If my father had not shown himself so bitter against me, if my mother had not lost all affection for me, we should still be in Long Orchard Farm. I beg you, my dearest, not to distress yourself with regrets. Besides, look at her." He pointed to the sleeping infant. "What

do we matter now? We have given *her* to the world. There never was such a baby girl. Just think, my Elizabeth, what you endured, what even I endured? And now look at her. Remember how fortune was on her side. I was never a religious man, but since that night in January I have been made conscious of a divine power that directs the universe. In the miracle of that small but perfect being born to you and me I have understood the great miracle of creation."

Elizabeth regarded her husband with admiration and awe.

"You have such noble thoughts," she flattered him. "But I cannot think like you. I can only remember the meadows where I played as a child and the clematis over the door and the cocks crowing on fine mornings in the summer-time. And now I'm leaving all that. And grandfather is leaving it. And you, my Edward, are being taken far over the sea to another country, and all because I selfishly loved you and selfishly let you love me."

The notes of a melody more sad than any which had yet been played drifted below from the deck. Elizabeth's tears fell fast like raindrops upon the petals of a rose. Nor could Edward's most tender words console her grief, nor could they mitigate her apprehensiveness nor lighten the gloom in which for her the future was enveloped. It was not until her grandfather came tapping at their cabin door, in which a moment later he stood framed with his

ruddy and jocund countenance, that she smiled.

"I've enjoyed myself rarely," he announced. "There's been singing up there as would put the heart in any man. There was never better fiddling in Barton Flowers, not when I was a nipper. I'm bothered if I han't enjoyed myself. Sleep like a top, the saying is. Bothered if I shan't sleep like a humming-top to-night."

He wished them well and stumped off to his berth.

"You see how happy the old man is!" Edward exclaimed.

And Elizabeth, now that the music had ceased to play upon her emotion, forgot her fears. In the morning when they went on deck London was sailing past them on either side of the ship, and a sharp wind from the northwest made the voyagers long for warm and sunny lands.

Among the emigrants was a middle-aged couple called Fawcus, both of whom showed themselves most friendly to the Flowers, and both of whom much admired the good behavior of the baby girl. Mr. Fawcus was a large, smooth-faced man of fifty, definitely parsonic in the general impression he gave with his suit of black broadcloth, a primness of manner that was noticeable in so large a man, and an inclination to discourse in rotund sentences. His wife was in every way a contrast to her husband, being small, restless, and quick-eyed, a woman obviously belonging to an inferior class, but who in spite

of her Cockney accent and vulgarity was obviously the leader and looked after her husband as sharply as a capable and well-trained nurse.

"I hope Mr. Micawber will still be alive when we reach Australia," said Edward. "Nobody else could keep pace with our friend."

"You haven't spoken of Mr. Micawber before, dear," said Elizabeth reproachfully. "I didn't know you had any friends in Australia."

"Mr. Micawber is a character in one of Mr. Charles Dickens' novels," he explained.

"Mr. Dickens who wrote the *Christmas Carol?*" Elizabeth asked.

"The same."

"He must be a very nice gentleman," was her murmured comment.

Edward laughed.

Mr. Fawcus according to himself had been reduced to emigration by the devotion of his energy, his talents, and his money to the great cause of popular education.

"My survey of history," he told Edward, "taught me that all the greatest human beings have been teachers. I determined, however humbly, to follow in their footsteps."

According to Mrs. Fawcus her husband's mistake had been first in wasting money on derelict schools, and secondly in destroying whatever chance such schools had of recovery by preaching in the open air of the locality on Sundays.

"People couldn't a-bear to send their children to Mr. Fawcus's school when they saw him preaching in the market-place like any heathen missionary. It gave them the idea he was funny, and so the scholars'ud leave until there wasn't one left, and then Mr. Fawcus had to move to another town and start over again with another school. Besides, I was always a hindrance to him."

"You were never a hindrance, my love."

"Oh, yes, I was, Mr. Fawcus, and well you know it. The truth is parents don't want a homely woman like me for a teacher. They look for something quite different in a school-mistress, something tall and starchy."

"And what are you going to do in Australia?" Edward asked.

"In Australia, my dear sir," Mr. Fawcus boomed, "in Australia I am going to educate the aborigines, who I understand from the reports of travelers are considered the most degraded race of human beings on this earth. Should that prove truer than the majority of travelers' tales there must be room for education. After my experience with the children of . . ."

"Hush!" his wife interjected. "Hush, Mr. Fawcus!"

"After my experience with the last school I founded in England the aborigines of Australia will be easy to manage. Their women, I believe, are known as ginns. A most unbecoming designation.

I shall try to persuade them to abolish that name. The sea is rising, I observe with regret. We are liable to pass a rough night, I fear. And I am usually right. In fact, my intimates often nickname me Mr. Forecast. My own name, by the way, is remarkable, don't you think? I have been tempted to speculate upon its origin, and I have sometimes fancied that it might be found among the *senatus populusque Romanus.* I was informed the other day, however, by a gentleman of curious etymological knowledge that it is probably a local variant of Fawkes. You of course remember Guy of that ilk? Yes, the sky is looking very dirty indeed."

A steely dusk of northwest weather lay chill upon the *Wizard Queen* when she was tossing in the Downs, and by night the wind was blowing with hurricane fury from the Kentish coast. The music and motion of the storm kept all on board awake, and when about three o'clock there was a crash followed by a dreadful sound of grinding timbers, the faces of the terrified passengers immediately appeared from every cabin.

Edward bade his wife wrap up the baby while he found out what had happened, and with only an overcoat over his nightshirt he forced his way on deck. From the darkness on the port side a shape seemed to carve itself to the fleeting likeness of another vessel, but it vanished so quickly that Edward fancied the vision to be a chimera of the night.

"All hands to lower the boats," a voice cried

from forward in the murk of the night. Figures in dripping oilskins, like monsters risen from the sea, pushed Edward aside to get at their business; but he managed to make his way back aft to where from the orange mist above the saloon-companion a stream of disheveled passengers belched forth like smoke waving in the blast. As he fought his way down to find Elizabeth and the old man, he heard another shout for'ard.

"The port lifeboat was smashed in the collision."

The saloon was empty when Edward reached it, and he was on the point of turning back to begin a distracted search on deck when Elizabeth came out of her cabin carrying the baby, her hair all about her shoulders, her aspect serene. She looked fragile, ethereal indeed, but amid all that confusion of human terror into which she must shortly be plunged she moved forward with the resolution of an angel. Behind her came the old man wrapped in a plaid shawl above his nightshirt, his face ruddy as ever, but his old legs appearing thin as twigs beneath, so that it seemed as if he must be blown away into the night when he should face the storm.

The crew was lowering the jolly-boat full of passengers when they reached the deck. Notwithstanding the peril, for the ship would not float another ten minutes it was being shouted, two of the sailors were arguing angrily about the rig of the craft that struck the *Wizard Queen*. One declared with an oath that it was a schooner; the other

affirmed with equal vigor that it had been a barquantine. A ship's officer hurrying by fell to cursing them for rascals that they should stand there arguing when the starboard lifeboat must be launched.

"Women and children first," the captain thundered.

A fiercer squall drummed overhead, and the emigrants that still remained in the ship huddled together in fear of that dreadful brew of waters upon which they were soon to float away. Somebody urged Elizabeth toward the lifeboat; but she drew back.

"Let somebody go instead of me. I'll wait for my husband," she said.

But it happened that she was the last woman left and that there was still room for Edward and old James, so that presently all three climbed into the lifeboat.

"Lower away!"

The lifeboat rocked for a moment in the davits; and then just as she reached the sea, being full in the weather, she was driven with great force against the ship's side and stove in. She seemed to be brimming over, but nevertheless the crew managed to shove her off, although by this time she was so deep in the water that the wretched passengers sitting on the thwarts were submerged from the waist downwards. It was only the cork in her compartments that kept her barely afloat. There were many faces still looking down from the steamer, and all on

board probably went down with her, or if the cutter was launched she must have been swamped immediately, for a minute or two later the *Wizard Queen* rose forward in the air and sank stern first. Now one by one, as the icy waves broke over them, the women and men in the lifeboat dropped from exhaustion into the sea. Old James Taylor was among the first to go, falling backward without a cry, without a word of reproach, as silently as one of his own red apples might fall at home in the first October gale.

"Did the Captain say where we was?" asked the man at the tiller.

"Abreast of Beachy Head," one shouted in reply, and as he spoke a wave swept him and a woman and a child into the darkness.

"O God! he's dead. He's lying dead in my arms!" cried a miserable father who was holding in his arms a little boy of five or six.

"Drop the body overboard," the man at the tiller shouted. "Every pound tells. Lighten the boat," he roared angrily. "Lighten the boat!"

The wretched father, clasping his dead child more closely, turned away in indignation at the brutal order; but as he turned a wave swept him and the body overboard, and the boat was lightened a little more.

All this time Elizabeth said nothing; but she clung to her place with one hand and with the other held the baby to her breast beneath her cloak. All this

time Edward said nothing; but he had somehow managed to wedge his legs round a support, so that whenever Elizabeth trembled in her seat he could put out two arms to save her from peril. Two women died of exhaustion from the wash of the sea and the freezing wind, and their bodies were at once flung overboard. On the other side of Elizabeth, Mrs. Fawcus, who alone of the women appeared to be completely dressed, was trying to get off her cloak to throw it round the mother, and simultaneously making an effort to listen to the plans of Mr. Fawcus for the future, should the lifeboat ever reach a harbor.

"I have given up my plan of educating the aborigines of Australia," he bellowed above the gale, making a megaphone with his hands.

"Yes, dear, I'm sure I agree with you. Drat this hook! It's so bent I can't get it out of the eye. And don't put up your hands and shout at me, Mr. Fawcus. You'll be swept over if you do."

"What has occurred once," Mr. Fawcus bellowed, "may easily occur again. I shall inquire for a suitable post in London. I always did execrate the sea, as you know, my dear."

Mrs. Fawcus nodded.

"And I was right," he shouted. "I usually am."

But his wife could not applaud his wisdom, for at that moment Elizabeth, reeling, cried:

"Take my baby. Edward! My darling, my

darling, I ought not to have married you. It's all my fault."

As Mrs. Fawcus took the baby, Elizabeth fell, and Edward, throwing himself backward in a last effort to save his wife, fell with her into the sea.

At dawn a small steamer sighted the wreck of the lifeboat and launched a boat to rescue the four who had survived that night. One was the man at the tiller; the other three were Mr. and Mrs. Fawcus with Mary Flower.

Chapter Two

THE GIRL

Chapter Two: The Girl

MARY FLOWER passed the first ten years of her life in the basement of a publisher's office in Paternoster Row, where every floor as high as the roof was loaded with the stock of years, so that the earliest defined fear of her childhood was lest the old house should collapse one night and bury herself and her uncle and aunt beneath a mountain of books. This was the result of reading the story of an earthquake in Jamaica; and the habit thus engendered of brooding upon seismic catastrophes led Mary soon afterward to prefigure the vaster ruin of St. Paul's Cathedral, the bulk of which obscured so much of the sky from her childish vision.

"You've no right to fill her head with such notions, Uncle William," said Mrs. Fawcus sharply. "Why, there was no more than a tiny little crack in the ceiling over her bed, and I'm sure the child regular worried the life out of me about that blessed crack."

"That's where you're wrong, Aunt Lucy," replied Mr. Fawcus. "When a child's interest is aroused in any natural phenomenon it is the duty of the parent or of the guardian who stands *in loco*

parentis to cultivate that interest by every means in his power. It is one of the rudimentary principles of education. Fate directed her to the narrative of an earthquake in the West Indies, rousing in her breast an ambition to know more about terrestrial convulsions, to learn about such facts as their comparative frequency and their geographical distribution. What has our little Mary learned? She has learned that nothing more than slight shocks may be expected in the heart of London and that . . ."

"Oh, how you do carry on, Uncle William! The poor child's learned nothing of the kind. She goes to bed shaking in her shoes every night."

However, Mary soon forgot all about earthquakes, because a dancing bear broke loose in St. Paul's Churchyard and created such a panic that for several weeks she saw bears at the back of every cupboard, and Mrs. Fawcus had to hide her favorite copy of *Red Riding Hood* on account of the tremors set up by the vivid illustrations. It must not be supposed that she was a very nervous child or that her existence was unusually spoilt by the incidental alarms of childhood. On the contrary, the world beheld in the basement of that tall Georgian warehouse was a placid and cozy world, her place in which she owed to the couple whom she knew as Uncle William and Aunt Lucy.

When Mr. Fawcus walked down the gangway of the steamer that rescued him from the wreck of that lifeboat and felt the terra-firma, as he called it,

of Dover Quay beneath his feet, he knelt down just outside the Lord Warden Hotel and vowed that he would never attempt to leave his native land again.

"I've been teaching all my life," he told Mrs. Fawcus. "But I can still learn a lesson myself."

The problem of the future was a difficult one, and it was not simplified by the responsibility of the baby.

"Though, mark you," said Mr. Fawcus gravely, "I consider that the education of one English girl is of more importance than the education of a thousand Australian aborigines. Unfortunately I have come to the end of my capital, and in order to educate her it will be necessary for me to find some kind of moderately remunerative employment."

"I'm glad to hear you speak so sensible, Mr. Fawcus," said his wife.

"Bly, my dear, bly. Sensi-bly. Don't let a shipwreck destroy in one moment what I have spent years in teaching you: the distinction between an adjective and an adverb."

During their short intercourse with the Flowers Mr. and Mrs. Fawcus, or to be accurate Mrs. Fawcus, had elicited an account of the circumstances which had led up to their emigrating; when it began to look as if Mr. Fawcus was never going to find a suitable job, his wife argued that they ought to communicate with the baby's grandfather.

"If we were going to say anything at all," Mr. Fawcus objected, "we ought to have written the mo-

ment we found ourselves safe on shore. Having left it so long, we may appear to the eyes of Sir Richard Flower like kidnappers. She is such a good baby that I hate to give her up, and besides I did want to try my hand at an education completely independent of those obstinate and conservative creatures which we know generically as 'parents.' "

Nevertheless, Mr. Fawcus, in dread of the uncertain future, was at last driven by his wife's entreaties into communication with the grandfather of the baby whose guardianship he had assumed in the presence of death.

101 Floral Street,
Near Covent Garden,
March 3rd, 1860.

Honored Sir,

You have no doubt read with a father's grief, in which I beg leave most respectfully to share, the melancholy news of the loss of the emigrant ship, Wizard Queen, by collision off Beachy Head at 3 a. m. on the morning of the 18th ult., and by this time you have no doubt abandoned all hope of hearing that your son, Mr. Edward Flower, was saved. I do not write to raise false hopes in your breast. Alas! I had the melancholy satisfaction of seeing him in the lifeboat to which we both clung (rather than in which we both sat) swept overboard in a vain attempt to save his wife from a similar fate. It may, however, be some mitigation of your sorrow to learn

that he left behind him in the care of myself and wife a baby girl, who is at present sharing our humble room at the above address. We should deeply feel parting with the engaging infant; but we respectfully recognize the superior claims of her grandparents. I have the honor to await your instructions with regard to her disposal. Will you send a suitable nurse to convey the infant to your Seat? Or shall my good wife take upon herself the responsibility of personally delivering the infant at Barton Hall?

I must apologize for the delay in notifying you of your granddaughter's fortunate survival; but I have recently been much occupied in trying to recover for myself the small niche in England which I so rashly abandoned in my ambition to put the glories of education within reach of the aborigines of Australia. In expectation of shortly hearing from you, I have the honor, Sir, to subscribe myself

Your most obedient humble servant,

William Axworthy Fawcus.

P. S.—I should add that I was formerly a schoolmaster, having been the proud possessor of several private schools in turn. Now for various reasons I find myself unable to devote myself any longer to the education of the young idea, and I have this morning entered into a contract with Messrs. Holland and Brown, the publishers of Paternoster Row, to invigilate their stock.

W. A. F.

To this the baronet replied as follows:

Barton Hall,
Barton Flowers, Hants,
March 8, '60.

Sir,

I have no interest in my son's daughter. At the same time, I am not anxious to be under an obligation to strangers for her maintenance. If you insist on giving up your care of the baby, I must find some other worthy couple to look after her. If, on the other hand, you are willing to accept that responsibility and will let me hear that you are prepared to do so, I will instruct my lawyers, Messrs. Hepper and Philcox, to remit you the sum of £100 a year in quarterly instalments payable in advance until she reaches the age of ten years, when I shall communicate fresh proposals. *Yours truly,*
Richard Flower.

Thus it befell that Mary continued to live with Mr. and Mrs. Fawcus, calling them Uncle William and Aunt Lucy, and indirectly being the cause of Mrs. Fawcus's getting nearer to an intimate mode of addressing her husband than she had ever reached before. The contract into which Mr. Fawcus had entered with Messrs. Holland and Brown might have been less grandly described as an engagement to be caretaker of their premises, for which he was paid the sum of eighteen shillings a week and allotted

the basement of kitchen, scullery, two rooms, a cellar, and a backyard.

"The task is in some respects a menial task," he told his wife. "But it is redeemed by the fact that I am a warden of books. Had I been invited to guard bales of dry goods, I should have declined the offer. I am ready in the cause of literature and learning to sacrifice what remains to me of scholastic dignity by exposing myself in the *toga virilis* of service, in other words, a green baize apron, punctually at 6.30 a. m. to the public eye, and if the public eye chooses to regard my daily renovation of the brass, my *quotidian lustration* of the steps, as menial, I merely say with what's his *nomen 'per aspera ad astra.'* "

"Well, all I beg is, Mr. Fawcus"—he had not become Uncle William yet—"all I beg is," said his wife, "you won't go preaching about St. Paul's Churchyard of a Sunday morning."

"In, my love, not about. On, my dear, not of. Your allusion was to the locality and date, not the subject of my discourse."

"Don't be so pernickety, Mr. Fawcus. You know quite well what I meant to say."

"The Queen's English, my dear, should share with the Queen's Person the privilege of inviolability. But set your mind at rest. Preserve the *mens sana in corpore sano.* Now that we have been intrusted with the nonage of that cherub," he pointed to Mary asleep in her cot, "I do not intend to jeopardize the material comforts of this basement. *Tu Marcellus*

eris! In other words, I intend to devote all my persuasive energy to Mary."

Mr. Fawcus kept his word. To be sure, he might say to his wife:

"Holland and Brown are going too far. They are impinging upon my pride. I felt very much inclined last night to utter a stern *noli me tangere.* But I thought of Mary, and I refrained. Yes, I thought of our Mary and I agreed to give the disposal of the day's waste-paper, the *disjecta membra* of their correspondence, my personal supervision."

Mr. Fawcus might complain of the advantage his employers took of his reduced circumstances; but he never did fail to remember what was owed to Mary. She was indeed the pivot of that basement in Paternoster Row, a little household goddess to whom the two old people accorded divine honors and through whom, brought close together by their common worship, they grew closer and closer to each other as the years went by. She was not a spoilt child, or at least she was not spoilt by anything except such humble treats and toys as her guardians could afford. Mrs. Fawcus was not a woman to give way out of laziness or weakness or fond affection to the exactions of childhood. She treated Mary in the same fashion as she had always treated her husband, that is to say, she loved and admired her as a superior being to herself, but she never allowed her to suppose that her behavior could not be criticized and corrected.

Mary herself at ten years old was a beautiful child, so beautiful that the degraded clothes of the period were incapable of concealing her beauty. From her mother she had inherited that auburn hair with all its texture of silk and all its abundance, but instead of brown eyes hers were deep blue, pellucid and round as speedwells. Sir Richard had such eyes once; and the painter who came to Barton Hall in the summer of 1810, without being afraid of the comparison, had painted him with a posy of corn-flowers, his eyes following the flight of blue butterflies. Old James Taylor had such eyes to the end; but he was never painted in tight pantaloons and a frilled collar. If a little girl has auburn hair, and big deep blue eyes, and a complexion like a malmaison, she has no need to bother about her features. Actually Mary showed promise of fine features emerging one day from her dimples, and her hands were as fine and delicate as her grandmother's.

From being without the companionship of other children, Mary had acquired what were called old-fashioned ways, which meant that she would always join in the conversation of her uncle and aunt, pay much attention to the deportment of her dolls, and spend a great deal of time reading fairy tales by the kitchen fire. The basement of a city warehouse may seem a dreary place for a little girl to spend most of her time; but Mary found it as full of romance as one of her own picture books, and apart from such fleeting alarms as the threat of earthquakes or

the dread of sudden and violent robbery, echoes of which occasionally reached her when Mr. and Mrs. Fawcus discussed events that near bedtime little girls ought not to overhear, Mary found her home safe and cosy. The small yard at the back was not so much overshadowed by the tall houses round as to keep the sun from shining down upon it in summer; here Mary had several green boxes in which she grew pansies and creeping jenny, mignonette and red and white double daisies. Here too in a wicker cage outside the kitchen door lived Mary's thrush, who sang his country song while Mary sat gazing up at the golden cross on the dome of St. Paul's and wondering if the thrush would like to be sitting there and if it would be kinder to set him free. It was a very small yard; yet it seemed illimitable to Mary, and every brick in the wall was to her as large and interesting as a field.

But if the yard seemed vast, how much vaster appeared the upper portions of the house! Sometimes when work was over Mr. Fawcus would let Mary accompany him on his tour of inspection round the deserted premises. She was allowed to climb up ladders and read the names of books stacked away on the highest shelves, dusty books with titles that sounded most uninteresting, although the recitation of them evidently gave great pleasure to Uncle William. And then one day in an attic she discovered hundreds of picture books, nearly all fairy stories. When she announced her discovery, Uncle William

shook his head and muttered, "Old stock! Old stock!"

"But, Uncle William, they're not old. They're quite new. Really they are—quite bright and not a bit torn. I found *The Three Bears* and a story about a mother pig who frightened away a wolf when he came to gobble up her little pigs. And how do you think she did it? You'll never guess, Uncle William. Why, she rolled down the hill in a churn. What is a churn, Uncle William?"

This was exactly the kind of question dear to the heart of Mr. Fawcus, and before Mary went to bed that night she had been given an exhaustive discourse on dairy-farming, so that if she had listened as attentively as her aunt kept bidding her listen, she would have learned the difference between curds and whey, and all about rennet, and all about Stilton cheeses and Devonshire cream, and why butter won't come sometimes . . . but alas! Mary did not listen, because her mind was far away upstairs in that attic.

It happened that the very next day she was sent on a message to one of the offices and that the gentleman to whom she gave the message, a dried-up gentleman with bright shining spectacles, asked her if she would like a penny to buy some lollipops.

"No, thank you, sir," said Mary, curtseying. "I'd like to go upstairs and look at those picture books at the top of the house."

Whereupon the dried-up gentleman mysteriously

muttered, "Old stock! Old stock!" just like Uncle William yesterday.

"Why, you may go there whenever you like, my little maid," he told her.

"Fancy that!" exclaimed Mrs. Fawcus when she was informed of this by Mary. "Well, did you ever? I'm sure I never did. I never did know such an old-fashioned child in my life, Uncle William. Never! Fancy her asking such a thing of Mr. Bristowe."

"It's old stock," said Mr. Fawcus.

And Mary when she had been given leave by her uncle and aunt to avail herself of Mr. Bristowe's kind offer whispered "old stock" when she opened the door of that dusty attic, for she felt that it was an enchanted phrase like Open Sesame. The attic window looked down into the backyard of the basement, and Mary could not resist opening the window, for although she felt sure that she ought not to lean out of a window, inasmuch as she lived in a basement she had never actually been forbidden to lean out of windows. Yes, there were her flowers, such tiny specks of color, down below, and there was the dustbin looking more than ever like a knight in armor, and there was her thrush's cage. Hark! he was singing. She could hear his song above the thunder of the London streets. The attic window had a window-seat where Mary spent long lovely mornings in April reading those dusty picture books one after another, face to face with the clouds while the

golden cross upon the dome of St. Paul's glittered in the sun. On the sill were the remains of a battered window-box still half full of earth. In this Mary sowed nasturtium seeds which grew miraculously, so that soon when Mary was in the yard she could look up and see the orange and yellow flowers waving in the wind against the dingy bricks of the warehouse.

"Rapunzel, Rapunzel," she called. "Let down your golden hair."

"What are you talking about?" Mrs. Fawcus exclaimed.

"I'm being the witch," Mary told her.

"Which what?"

"The witch. The witch who climbed up to the tower by Rapunzel's golden hair."

"Did anybody ever hear anything like it?"

And when Mrs. Fawcus came out into the yard at Mary's invitation and looking up saw the nasturtiums, she was more exclamatory than ever.

"Well, it give me quite a turn," she vowed to Uncle William. "The like of that child was never known."

Nearly all the clerks in the office came up to look at Mary's nasturtiums; and Mr. Bristowe was so much delighted that he gave her a small red watering-can.

"It's a wonder the sparrows don't peck them to pieces," said Mr. Fawcus, when Mary's triumph was being discussed in the basement.

"If they did, they'd burn their tongues," said Mary.

"Well, now, did you ever hear a more old-fashioned remark?"

"Passer deliciæ meæ puellæ," boomed Mr. Fawcus.

Until Mary discovered that new world in the roof, her chief pleasure apart from the backyard had been a cellar in front of the basement which was lighted from a square of opaque glass set in the pavement of the street. She was willing to spend hours here, sitting on an old footstool, surrounded by her dolls and pretending to be a sea-nymph. A wet day, and it was chiefly on wet days that Mary frequented this cellar, heightened the illusion of being under the sea, because the skylight, if such an aperture may be called a skylight, when blurred with rain was more than usually aqueous, and the shadows of people passing overhead were more than usually like fish. Mrs. Fawcus, when she first heard of Mary's pastime, was moved to utter dark interpretations of it.

"Depend upon it, Uncle William, that child's life is going to be mixed up with deep water. Mark my words, she'll cross the sea many a time before she goes down to the grave."

"Do not vaticinate, my dear," her husband commanded. "Absit omen!"

"I don't know what you're talking about, but when any one thinks of that night ten years ago and when any one sees that dear innocent sitting out

there and staring up at the fishes, as she calls them, well, any one may be forgiven for doing what any one's told by their husband they mustn't do."

"Ten years ago," Mr. Fawcus repeated. "So it is. I wish you'd keep your thoughts to yourself sometimes, Aunt Lucy. Ten years ago!"

She shuddered, for he was thinking of those fresh proposals to be made in ten years.

"Here's the money from the lawyers," said Mrs. Fawcus one morning in March, handing her husband the familiar envelope which had arrived regularly every quarter-day.

Mr. Fawcus, on whose countenance a decade of looking after the stock of Messrs. Holland and Brown had not left a mark, became suddenly old and flabby when he read through that letter. In that moment even his Latinity deserted him. The dreadful fact could not be evaded like so many other facts in his life by ponderous rhetoric and polysyllabic euphemisms.

"We've got to give her up," he groaned.

His wife snatched the letter from him.

"Where's Mary?" she asked, quickly looking round before she said anything Mary ought not to hear.

"She's gone up to her attic to sow the seeds I bought her yesterday. She wanted to try sweet sultans this year. She's up in the attic sowing sweet sultans."

Mr. Fawcus buried his face in his hands and bent

low in unutterable despair, while his wife read the lawyer's letter.

151 Lamb's Conduit Street, W.C.,
March 24, 1870.

Dear Sir,

We are instructed by our Client, Lady Flower of Barton Hall, Barton Flowers, to say that she has decided to receive into her house her granddaughter, Miss Mary Flower. We beg to enclose in addition to the usual quarterly allowance of £25 a check for £50, in order that Miss Mary Flower may be suitably equipped for the journey to Paris, where Lady Flower is now living and where she wishes her granddaughter to join her. If you will give us a call at your earliest convenience, we shall be happy to provide you with any advice you may require in respect of the journey. Lady Flower desires us to thank you for the care you have taken of Miss Mary Flower and begs that if you have not already explained to her the peculiar circumstances in which you took charge of her you will do so now.

In case you may not be acquainted with the facts, we may add that a year after Mr. Edward Flower lost his life in the wreck of the Wizard Queen, his elder brother, Mr. John Flower, was killed in the hunting-field. By the death of Sir Richard Flower, which occurred last November, Lady Flower inherited the whole of his property and she is no doubt

anxious to provide suitably for the youngest and only surviving member of the family.

Yours faithfully,
Hepper and Philcox.

Mrs. Fawcus went across to where her husband was still sitting with bowed head.

"William!" she murmured. It was the first time in thirty-five years of married life that she had dared to call him simply that.

"William!" she repeated more confidently, for the outward semblance of things had not been changed by her daring address. "You must write *them* a letter."

"It would be useless, my dear," he muttered without raising his head. "Useless, utterly and completely useless. A labor of Sisyphus, my love."

Nevertheless, Mr. Fawcus was persuaded to try, and he composed the following letter to Messrs. Hepper and Philcox:

c/o Messrs. Holland and Brown,
Publishers,
95 Paternoster Row,
London, E. C.,
March 25, 1870.

Dear Sirs,

Your communication of the 24th inst. with kind enclosures was duly received. For the moment I am too much disturbed by the situation thus created

to express worthily my repugnance to the notion of losing Miss Mary Flower. I should esteem it a favor if you would, so far as the emotions of a suppositious father can be suitably conveyed through the medium of legal phraseology, convey to Her Ladyship that my good wife and myself are most anxious not to part with the child whom we literally snatched from the angry deep. With all respect I venture to observe that until this moment none of her relatives has shown the slightest concern for the child's welfare beyond the quarterly allowance of £25 sterling. Mrs. Fawcus and myself on the other hand have never felt anything but the profoundest affection for her, and I can assure you that we would have left ourselves with nothing more than the bare necessities of life rather than that she should have wanted for the least thing.

In the hope of shortly receiving from you a favorable reply to my request,

I am, Gentlemen,
Your obedient servant,
William Axworthy Fawcus.

It was settled not to say anything to Mary until the lawyers wrote again:

151 Lamb's Conduit Street, W.C.
April 3, 1870.

Dear Sir,

We have to say in answer to your letter of the 25th ult. that we have communicated the substance

of your request to Lady Flower, and that she is unable to agree to your suggestion that Miss Mary Flower should remain in your care. We take this opportunity to point out that when in March, 1860, *the late Sir Richard Flower invited you to look after his granddaughter he made it clear that such an arrangement was for ten years, at the end of which time he gave you to understand the future of the child would once more come up for discussion.*

Hoping that we shall hear from you in the course of a day or two, appointing a time to call upon us,

We are,
Yours faithfully,
Hepper and Philcox.

"Who's to tell Mary?" Mrs. Fawcus asked with fear in her voice.

"Well, I had thought of your telling her," Mr. Fawcus admitted. "But perhaps the most equitable way would be for us both to tell her."

The worst of it was that, when they did brace themselves to tell her and were prepared at whatever cost to themselves to alleviate in every possible way her grief, Mary herself jumped for joy at the notion of visiting her grandmother in France.

"She doesn't mean to be cruel," said Mrs. Fawcus, patting her husband's arm reassuringly.

"No, no, certainly not," he agreed. "It's just the heedlessness of youth."

Mrs. Fawcus sighed.

"We were young once ourselves, Mr. Fawcus." The imminent departure of Mary made "Uncle William" sound ridiculous now, and Mrs. Fawcus went back to her time-honored mode of address.

"Many years ago, my love," he said, shaking his head. "And I'm afraid that you've had much to put up with since then. I have wasted my opportunities sadly. I ought to have been in a superb position by now."

"I'm sure I don't wish for anything better than what we've got," Mrs. Fawcus declared, trying to sound cheerful. "I'm sure as basements go, one couldn't wish for a nicer basement. It's so lovely and light for one thing."

"If I were to die, my dear, I'm convinced that Holland and Brown would offer you the refusal of my post."

"Oh, don't talk like that, Mr. Fawcus. Die? What ever next, to be sure?"

"*Tempora, mutantur nos et mutamur in illis.* It won't be the same without our Mary."

"You're going to make me cry if you keep on keeping on so." Mrs. Fawcus uttered a few warning sniffles.

At that moment she, who by her reception of the news had added the last bitterness to the separation, came dancing back from her dolls to whom as a great secret she had been telling about her departure.

"Do you think my granny will be like a fairy god-

mother?" Mary asked. "Because if she is I shall ask her to wave her magic wand and bring my dear Uncle William and my dear Aunt Lucy to France."

"Will you, Mary, will you? But I'm too old and fat to be waved by fairy godmothers," said Mr. Fawcus sadly.

Mary began to understand at last that her going away was a grief to her kind guardians, and as she had often done before, when it seemed advisable to propitiate Uncle William, or when Uncle William came downstairs very angry over some new task that Holland and Brown had laid upon him, she asked him a question.

"How big is France, Uncle William?" And folding her hands across her clean pinafore she composed herself to listen more attentively to a long account of France than she had ever listened to any of Uncle William's exegetical discourses before.

But Uncle William did not answer, and Mary, horrified at his silence, began to cry.

"For goodness' sake, child, don't wipe your eyes on your clean pinafore," Mrs. Fawcus sharply adjured her. It was like Mrs. Fawcus to have put Mary into a clean pinafore just to learn that she was to be taken from them.

A shaft of sunlight, the first of the year to reach the basement, came glancing through the geraniums in the window and lit up the cosy kitchen; but it was a cruel shaft, for it lit up also the weary lines and the baggy eyes of Mr. Fawcus: it lit up the crows-

feet and the wrinkles of his wife; and most cruelly of all it lit up Mary's auburn hair, reminding the old couple that, though the sun might shine all the summer through, here it would never shine again upon that auburn hair.

The next fortnight went by for Mary in such a whirl of exciting new experiences as no child of ten could be expected not to enjoy, and she was hardly to be blamed if she did appear hard-hearted in her behavior on the verge of parting with her guardians. She could hardly be blamed for not realizing how unlikely it was that she would ever see either of them again, and in justice to the old couple it must be said that neither of them tried to gratify their emotion at Mary's expense. Once the first shock had passed, they did their best to prepare her for a worthy entrance upon the new scene, at whatever cost to themselves. A number of dresses were bought, each one more outrageous than the last, and each one seeming as much more beautiful to Mary.

"I feel like Cinderella going to the ball," she told Mrs. Fawcus.

"Ah, my dear, you'll find that life isn't quite such a fairy story as you think it is now," replied Mrs. Fawcus.

And this was as near as she got to a hint of cynicism in her advice to the little girl.

For the visit to the lawyers Mr. Fawcus arrayed himself in a black suit he had not worn for eleven years, in fact, not since the annual prize-giving at

the last school he owned. It had been packed in the bottom of a large trunk to go to Australia, where it was intended to be worn at the ceremonious welcomes that Mr. Fawcus hoped to receive in his new country. By good fortune this trunk had missed being put on board the *Wizard Queen,* and both Mr. and Mrs. Fawcus had been able to live for ten years on the clothes it had contained.

Mr. Hepper and Mr. Philcox were even more desiccated than Mr. Bristowe of Holland and Brown's. Both their waistcoats were dusty with snuff, so dusty that if Mr. Philcox had not happened to prick his finger while he was talking to Mary and displayed on the tip of it an infinitesimal but withal definitely recognizable drop of blood Mary might have thought that they were stuffed with sawdust like her own dolls.

"And what arrangements have you made for conveying Miss Flower to her grandmother?" asked Mr. Hepper.

"Mrs. Fawcus will conduct her to Paris," said Mr. Fawcus. "I should have taken her myself if I had not recorded a solemn vow on Dover Quay ten years ago never to cross the sea again."

"Ah, that would be after you were wrecked, no doubt," said Mr. Philcox. "Yes—um—ah! I've never been wrecked myself, Mr. Fawcus."

"It is an experience which happily falls to the lot of few," said Mr. Fawcus.

"Yes—um—ah! Then I may take it as definite

that this young lady will leave by the Dover packet on Wednesday next. How is the glass, Mr. Hepper?"

"The glass is steady, Mr. Philcox."

"The glass augurs well for the voyage across, Mr. Fawcus. You hear what Mr. Hepper says."

"Is there anything more you wish to tell me?" Mr. Fawcus inquired, bowing to each of the partners in turn.

Mr. Hepper looked at Mr. Philcox, who shook his head.

"Nothing more, thank you, Mr. Fawcus," they declared in unison.

Mr. Fawcus was about to take his leave, when Mr. Philcox held up his hand.

"But wait a minute. Dear me, we have forgotten something. Yes—um—ah! Lady Flower instructed us that if on inquiries we should find that you had suitably performed your duty towards her granddaughter we should offer you this handsome token of appreciation."

Mr. Philcox flourished an envelope.

"I am happy to say, Mr. Fawcus, that our inquiries have proved perfectly satisfactory, and so perhaps you will take a little peep inside and also, I think, Mr. Hepper, it might be more in order if Mr. Fawcus were to sign this little receipt."

"Please thank her ladyship from me," said Mr. Fawcus grandly, putting the envelope down on the lawyer's table. "But the only token of her appre-

ciation that I or Mrs. Fawcus should esteem would be an occasional communication from her lawyers if she does not care to write herself letting us know that—er—this young lady is well and happy. I wish you a very good morning, gentlemen." Mr. Fawcus made a bow, and left the office with Mary.

A few days later Mr. Fawcus, from the gliding shore, was waving farewell to the little girl.

"Don't forget to water my sweet sultans, Uncle William," Mary cried above the turmoil of the paddles.

"The less you say about water to poor Uncle William," Mrs. Fawcus commented almost sharply, "the better. It must have been just here that he carried you ashore in his arms ten years ago."

The steamer backed and brought poor Uncle William within earshot again.

"I was telling Mary that just about here you carried her ashore," Mrs. Fawcus called to her husband.

"Sunt lacrimæ rerum," he chanted, and, when this time the paddles churned up the water in earnest, Mr. Fawcus buried his face in a bandana handkerchief and waved a limp glove from the receding shore, a limp glove that pathetically expressed the condition of mind and body to which its owner was by now reduced.

The journey was too full of excitement for Mary to be long saddened by the vision of Mr. Fawcus on the quay. Most children remember their first Channel crossing; but this great event in Mary's case was

made doubly noteworthy from its being the only adventure of any importance she had ever known, so placid had been her life in that Paternoster Row basement.

"Ah, you wouldn't be dancing about quite so gaily, Miss, if you could remember the first time you was on the sea," said Mrs. Fawcus. "Still, I'm bound to say you behaved very well then, all considering. Though why you didn't die of that perishing wind I'm sure I don't know, and that's a fact."

"Shall we be wrecked to-day, Aunt Lucy?"

"For the love of mercy, don't talk of such things," Mrs. Fawcus begged. "If you feel sick, chew a bit of lemon peel and let it come. Don't be afraid. Them as manages this boat have seen thousands of people sick. They don't consider it any more than blowing the nose, as you might say."

But Mary was not sick, and when Mrs. Fawcus came back to Paternoster Row she told her husband of this convincing indication of a mysterious bond between Mary and the sea.

"If I have a window-box in Paris," said Mary, when the chalk cliffs of England were become ghosts in the mist, "I shall plant sweet williams, because Uncle William is sweet, isn't he, Aunt Lucy?"

"Bless your heart, my little treasure," Mrs. Fawcus exclaimed as she clasped Mary to her heart. "It'll be meat and drink to poor Uncle William to hear that."

When the various difficulties of customs and porters and trains and cabs had been surmounted, and Mary holding tightly to the hand of Mrs. Fawcus was standing on the steps of her grandmother's house in the Avenue de Wagram, she felt a sudden desire to turn round and go back to the basement in Paternoster Row. So far it had all been a delightful adventure, but now she was tired of the adventure and was thinking about her thrush which always sang so sweetly in the month of April.

"Oh dear, I wish it *was* really a dream and that I was going to wake up now," she whispered to Mrs. Fawcus; but just then the door opened, and in a moment Mary was inside her grandmother's house.

She was vaguely aware, when she was stumping upstairs behind the footman, of tiger-skins and dark paneled walls and soft carpets; but before she had time to look round, two great doors had been flung open, and while Mrs. Fawcus drew back she had to walk over an immense slippery floor to where in a kind of inner room her grandmother was reading a yellow book by the fire. She heard from far away in that vast outer room the sharp whisper of Aunt Lucy: "Run along quick and give your grandmother a nice kiss." However, Mary did not dare to run, but stepped very carefully over the head first of a polar bear and then of a black bear until she stood before her grandmother's chair.

"I've come to see you, Grandmamma," she announced.

Lady Flower rose from her chair and looked critically at the little girl for a moment before she bent over and kissed her cheek.

"And is this good woman Mrs. Fawcus?" she asked.

"That's Aunt Lucy," said Mary.

Lady Flower frowned slightly.

"I expect you'll like a cup of tea after your journey, Mrs. Fawcus," she said, pulling a big purple bell-rope that hung before the fireplace.

"Oh, no, thank you, my lady. Nothing at all, thank you. I think I ought to be getting back to Mr. Fawcus as soon as possible."

"Is your husband waiting outside?" Lady Flower inquired.

"Oh, no, thank you, my lady. He sent many apologies for not coming too, but he's never been to sea since he was wrecked."

The footman came in at this moment, and Lady Flower told him to take Mrs. Fawcus downstairs for a cup of tea.

"Oh, no, thank you, my lady. Too kind of you, I'm sure, but I'd really rather be going, now that I've seen Mary safely here. I've arranged to go back to Calais and wait there the night. Mr. Fawcus thought he'd be less anxious that way than if I was to stay in Paris all by myself. We shall miss Mary most terribly, my lady. If I might just kiss her good-by and be off? I'm sure it's a pity Mr.

Fawcus couldn't have come. He's much superior to me in every way."

"Well, if you insist on going back at once," said Lady Flower, who was beginning to think that after all she had nothing to say to Mrs. Fawcus, and who would have cut out her tongue rather than ask the one question she wanted to ask about the death of her son.

"Yes, indeed I think I will, my lady, and thank you kindly, I'm sure, for the offer of tea."

Mrs. Fawcus darted forward, kissed Mary passionately several times, and seemed to slide out of the room across the parquet and out of her life forever.

When Lady Flower was alone with her granddaughter she was more at ease. She was little changed by ten years; she was still the same delicately ivorine creature as when she banished this child's father from her heart with words of contempt for this child's mother. Not that she ever really did banish Edward; the death of her elder son with all his valor and renown did not touch her half so deeply as the loss of Edward. If it had not been for Sir Richard's determination to ignore Edward's offspring she might long ago have sent for Mary. Her husband's bitterness against Edward, drowned dead though he was by that time, was intensified when John was killed in the hunting-field. He declared fiercely to his wife that he was glad Edward had not left a son, for that he would rather

the name and title of the Flowers should perish utterly than that the fruit of his son's disgraceful alliance with one of his own tenants should carry on both.

Mary was astonished to find how young her grandmother was. She had expected a very old lady—almost she had pictured her with a spinning-wheel and wearing a steeple-crowned hat—who would be bent double and talk in a high, cracked voice. Instead of that she found some one who looked much younger than Aunt Lucy.

"You'll have to go to school, you know," her grandmother was saying. "You'll have a great deal to learn. Let me look at your hands, child. Dear me, I believe you're going to have hands like mine. But your nails are a little grubby."

"That's because I've been gardening all last week."

"Gardening? Where did you garden in London?"

"In the attic. Mr. Bristowe let me garden there."

"No wonder your nails are grubby. And who is Mr. Bristowe?"

"He was the manager of Holland and Brown, where Uncle William was caretaker."

Lady Flower shuddered.

"Listen, Mary. I would rather you gave up calling Mr. and Mrs. Fawcus uncle and aunt. They are not any relation to you, and now that you are get-

ting older you must learn to speak of them as Mr. Fawcus and Mrs. Fawcus."

"But I always called them Uncle William and Aunt Lucy."

Lady Flower tapped her foot impatiently.

"I know that, and that is why I want you to break yourself of the habit of calling them uncle and aunt. They are good and worthy people, but you are going to lead quite a different kind of life nowadays, and it wouldn't do . . ."

Lady Flower hesitated. Worldly woman though she was, she hesitated almost shamefacedly to tell this child gazing up at her with astonished eyes that Mr. and Mrs. Fawcus were common. She decided to let her granddaughter learn gradually to be ashamed of the lowly couple who had watched over her from infancy to girlhood.

"You have my hands, and you have your father's eyes," said Lady Flower, changing the subject.

"And my mother's hair, Aunt Lucy said."

"Yes, and now I think you'd better go and take off your things. We'll go shopping to-morrow, and when you're equipped I'll take you myself to the school where you're going to learn . . ." Once again Lady Flower broke off. She had been on the point of saying: "To forget all about your life in London." Perhaps if she had known that Mary had lived in a basement she would not have been able to refrain, for life in a basement would have seemed to Lady Flower unimaginably squalid.

"Go shopping again?" echoed Mary in amazement. "Why, all these last days I've been shopping with Aunt Lucy."

"Yes, I did not want you to arrive in rags."

Mary found that there were many other things her grandmother did not want before she had been long in her new home. Accustomed to have her ordinary behavior regarded with admiration and approval by Mr. and Mrs. Fawcus, she could not understand that to her grandmother her manners appeared uncouth, her habit of speech common. She was continually being reproved for the way she held her knife and fork, or for using a spoon naturally, that is by putting the narrow end into her mouth first.

"But if I drink my soup sideways I make a noise," she expostulated. "And Aunt Lucy—I mean Mrs. Fawcus told me not to make a noise."

"I do not make a noise, do I?" Grandmamma asked with raised eyebrows.

Mary longed to tell her that she did make a noise sometimes and that, when she was drinking, in the silence of the large dining-room it sounded like pigeons cooing far away.

"And don't keep pulling up your stockings like that," Grandmamma would say.

"But one of them keeps coming down."

"In that case go to Adèle and ask her to tighten your garter."

"But it's too tight already," Mary objected.

"When I undress you can see all crinkles where it was round my leg."

"And don't argue with people older than yourself," Grandmamma would conclude.

At first Mary had rather enjoyed the ceremoniousness with which she was treated by Lady Flower's servants, enjoyed being called Mademoiselle and having doors flung open for her and never having to get up in the middle of dinner and fetch clean plates. She felt like one of her own fairy heroines who had sprung from goose-girl to princess in a night. But all too soon grandeur began to be wearisome, and when she saw the maids disappearing into what Lady Flower called "the lower regions" she felt that she would like to disappear too.

A warm and cosy smell sometimes penetrated "the upper regions" from the open door at the head of the staircase leading down to the kitchens, and this emphasized the frigidity above. At first Mary liked her new frocks and sashes and ribbons, but she never liked having her hair brushed and combed by Adèle. And soon she grew to dislike her new frocks, because they became associated with endless afternoons in the *salon,* when numbers of ladies chattered French, ladies who either smelled very strongly of scent or of being ladies and who had not that pleasant soapy aroma of Aunt Lucy. At first Mary enjoyed walking in the Parc Monceau with Grandmamma or driving with her to the Bois de Boulogne; but soon these walks and drives became tiresome,

for she was continually being told to hold herself up or not to turn round and stare or to talk without shouting. In the basement at Paternoster Row she had never missed the company of other children; but here in the Parc Monceau, which was full of children, Mary began to long for playmates. She took to lingering behind Grandmamma on these walks, and when she was reproved for doing so she always made the same excuse that she had waited behind a moment to see what that little boy or that little girl was doing. Lady Flower had enough sympathy and imagination to realize that Mary was beginning to feel the need of companions, so she arranged to have a children's party for her granddaughter. But Mary did not enjoy this party at all. The little girls invited were so very well behaved. Nobody romped or did any of the jolly things children did in books. They treated Mary with grave courtesy, calling her Mademoiselle, and except that the guests were in short frocks and wore their hair down there was no difference between this party and one of Grandmamma's crowded afternoons in the *salon*.

"I really must make up my mind to take you to Châteaublanc," Grandmamma proclaimed after Mary had been in Paris for nearly two months. "Did you tell me that Mr. Fawcus taught you to read and write?"

"Yes, and he said I learned very quickly."

"So I should think," Grandmamma commented

dryly. "I'm afraid you'll have a hard time at school."

Mary began to dread this school which was always being talked about, and every time with some unpleasant addition to its already long list of disagreeable potentialities.

"I didn't intend to go to Aix until late in the summer," said Grandmamma. "And I had thought of keeping you with me until then, but perhaps it's unwise to postpone your education any longer. So I'll take you there next week. I've written to Mademoiselle Lucinge and suggested that you should stay right on through the summer holidays, so that by Christmas, when you'll be nearly eleven years old, won't you, I shall expect to see quite a different Mary."

Perhaps Mary looked sad at the notion of the change that was to be wrought in her by so many consecutive months of Mademoiselle Lucinge's *Pension.* At any rate, Lady Flower became momentarily affectionate, as she put her arm round Mary and said:

"It's not your fault, you poor little thing, and you mustn't think I'm unkind. But I do want you to be able to get a great deal out of life, and there's nothing that is so terribly able to prevent that as not knowing exactly how to behave."

Mary stared at her grandmother, utterly incapable of understanding what she was talking about.

The old lady—for when Lady Flower unbent she

suddenly became an old lady—took Mary upon her knee.

"You funny little thing," she said, "you and I are so very much alone in the world."

Then a moment later she disengaged herself from Mary's warm, responsive embrace and became her ivorine self.

"When you go to school, I want you to give up writing to Mr. and Mrs. Fawcus. There will have to come a moment when you quite break off communication with them, and it had better be sooner than later. They have both behaved very well, which shows that they understand how completely the relationship between you and them has changed. Now give me a kiss and run off to Adèle. It is time you were in bed."

Mary went sadly upstairs and dreamed of a castle full of dungeons and of being chased by a crocodile, the castle being the *pension de jeunes filles* and the crocodile being Mademoiselle Lucinge herself.

A week after this Lady Flower succeeded in making up her mind to brave the long railway journey down through the heart of France and leave her granddaughter at Châteaublanc.

"Perhaps after all I could go to Aix earlier this year," she sighed with the air of proclaiming a martyrdom.

It was a fine June morning when they set out from the Gare de Lyon; but Mary became sad and apprehensive as one green mile after another was left

behind under the changeless blue sky, for though she had ceased to pine for the life of the basement in Paternoster Row, she always felt while she was still in Paris that she knew the way back and that if ever she should be faced with something unbearably disagreeable, she should be able to escape. Now she was being carried farther away every moment like that bluebottle who was buzzing on the warm glass of the carriage windows. She began to make up a story about that bluebottle while Grandmamma dozed among her cushions on the opposite seat—a story of how this father bluebottle would arrive at Châteaublanc and try to find the mother bluebottle and all the little bluebottles. Of course if he knew the way back he would be better off than herself, because he would be able to fly. But he wouldn't know the way back, and he would go buzzing about Châteaublanc trying to find his home until one day he would be killed, and the mother bluebottle and all the little bluebottles in Paris would never know what had become of him. Mary was so much moved by the woeful story that she felt a tear spring to her eyes and a lump in her throat. If only she had thought of it sooner, she might have let the bluebottle out. Perhaps even now he would not have traveled too far to know his way back. Mary raised the blind and tried to help the bluebottle out of the open window with her handkerchief; but he did not seem able to understand that she was trying to help him and went buzzing all over the compartment un-

til at last he buzzed across Grandmamma's nose and woke her up.

"What are you doing, Mary?"

Mary did not like to explain just what she was really doing. So she looked abashed and said that she was doing nothing.

"Well, don't," said Grandmamma, dozing off again.

Mary tried to think how one did not do nothing; which raised an old problem of how one thought about nothing, and she tried once more to think about nothing.

"But if I think about nothing," she thought, "I'm thinking about thinking about nothing. And if I think about thinking about nothing I'm thinking about something."

She once asked Uncle William if he could think about nothing and if not why not. Whereupon Uncle William had told her that Parmenides had been puzzled by the same problem two thousand years ago and more.

"Who was Pa Many D's?" Mary had asked, for that was the way she pictured the name.

Uncle William had informed her that Parmenides was a philsopher who founded the Eleatic school.

"Well, when I'm old I'll marry a philosopher," Mary had announced, for it sounded a pleasant word to say and a pleasant thing to be, and Uncle William had founded schools. Mary thought about Pa Many D's now in the hot dusty railway carriage, and

tried to remember what school he founded. But she could only think of "asthmatic" and "rheumatic," neither of which sounded right.

Mary printed S-K-O-O-L on the window with a wet finger, shuddered, and looking round perceived that the bluebottle had escaped.

At that moment the train puffed into Dijon station, where Grandmamma waking up decided it was time to have lunch. Mary enjoyed that while it lasted. But after lunch Grandmamma went more fast asleep than ever; the carriage grew hotter and hotter; the country grew greener and greener, and the sky more blue.

"Pouff!" Mary sighed. "Pouff-ff-ff!"

The train reached Macon, when Mary was in the middle of speculating how many times she had said pouff since Dijon.

"I must have said a thrillion pouffs," she decided, and wished that Grandmamma would wake up and be conversational, so that she might display her acquaintance with that numeral. Or perhaps she had better reserve it for Mademoiselle Lucinge. How could she bring it in? Mary began to compose the interview with her mistress.

"How do you do, my little girl?"

"I am very well, thank you, Mademoiselle."

"Did you have a comfortable journey?"

"Yes, thank you, Mademoiselle. My grandmamma and I passed a very pleasant day in the

train. What a long way off you live! About a thrillion miles, I suppose."

Mary decided that this sounded a little too far when it was put into speech. Perhaps on consideration she had better be content with impressing Grandmamma.

"Supposing she never wakes up!" Mary thought in alarm. "Supposing she's gone to sleep like the Sleeping Beauty for thrillions of years? Only she's not a Beauty," Mary added to herself in hopeful parenthesis. However, soon after this Grandmamma did wake up, by which time Mary herself had fallen asleep, and did not wake until the train reached Lyon, where they got out and drove in the dusk along the banks first of one river and then of another equally large until they reached their hotel. Mary was sent with the chambermaid to have a bath before she went to bed, and she had to walk along half a dozen dark, crooked passages before she reached the bathroom, which was full of steam; the bath itself was covered with a large sheet which floated about in the water and kept bellying out on either side of Mary as she splashed about. Her bath seemed to have caused much excitement in the hotel, for all the time people kept coming to the door and shouting outside to the chambermaid, who kept shouting back as excitedly while the pipes on the wall groaned and bubbled and clashed until Mary was glad when her bath was finished and the chambermaid, after wrapping her in several towels,

picked her up in her arms and carried her back through the corridors, running fast and shouting to everybody she met to get out of the way. That night Mary slept in an enormous four-poster with heavy red curtains, and in the morning she went for a drive with her grandmother first along the banks of the sluggish, dark green Saône and then beside the sparkling azure Rhône. But what Mary liked best in Lyon was the Cathedral on the top of a steep hill, which looked like an elephant upside down with gilded legs and a golden trunk. After *déjeuner* they got into a most extraordinary train with carriages as tall as houses where passengers sat on top without any roof over them, in which they were puffed along until they reached their destination.

Châteaublanc was a small red-roofed town built upon the southern slopes of a range of low hills that rose not much higher than the rolling countryside of woodland, pasture, and vineyard, at the foot of which a small tributary of the Saône ran its shallow course over a bed of limestone. The ruins of the castle that gave its name to Châteaublanc still stood like an acropolis above the town, the sight of which compensated Mary for much, since this must really once upon a time have been an enchanted castle without any need to pretend that it was one. In fact, from the moment she alighted at the station Mary liked Châteaublanc. She liked the wide main street, where the houses dreamed in the sunlight behind green shutters and Gloire de Dijon roses, and where

in the middle of the front parterres beautiful purple and silver globes shimmered with the movement of the small world therein reflected.

"Oh, Grandmamma, how beautiful they are!" she cried, clapping her hands.

"Yes, you're in roseland here," said Lady Flower.

"No. Not the roses. They're beautiful too. But those purple balls!"

"My dear child, you don't mean to say you think those monstrous tinsel spheres beautiful! Why, they're perfectly hideous!"

Mary regarded her grandmother in amazement. She must be mad. She must be upset by the journey. She must be joking.

"Oh, and look! That garden's got five!" she shrieked, nearly falling out of the *fiacre* in her delight. "One purple. One silver. One blue. One gold. And one red. I hope in heaven there are thrillions and thrillions of them."

"God forbid!" exclaimed Lady Flower, sniffing her vinaigrette in dismay at the picture. "And I suppose you mean trillions."

Mary was silent after this until the *fiacre* took them beyond the main street into an avenue of clipped acacias and limes, from which they turned aside through wide paths into a curved drive where hydrangeas bloomed in the beds on either side.

"What funny flowers!" Mary exclaimed. "They're like the little woman in a house Uncle . . . Fawcus . . . Mr. Fawcus gave me. When

it was going to be wet, her bonnet and dress was pink and when it was going to be fine they were blue. Only really she wasn't ever pink or blue, but like those flowers, and then she was always wrong."

The *fiacre* pulled up before a house with a white portico and French windows opening to the wide verandah that ran round it.

"Is this really going to be my school?" Mary asked incredulously. "Why, I thought it was going to be quite an ugly place. Oh, Grandmamma," she cried, "how kind of you to give me such a nice school!"

Lady Flower had been influenced by a number of considerations in her choice of a school for Mary, but what undoubtedly had least influence was her granddaughter's point of view in the matter. Nevertheless, as grown-up people use, she accepted the child's gratitude with complacency.

It certainly was a good school. Mademoiselle Lucinge was a woman of taste and breeding, who when little more than a girl had gone as governess to the house of an English nobleman, where she had remained ten years. Having inherited from a distant relative a house and a small property, she had felt justified in carrying out a project upon which she had for a long time set her heart. During her stay in England she had had an opportunity of coming into contact with a number of distinguished people, and from the moment she had opened her *pension* she had been successful. The greater number of her

pupils were English, but many other nationalities were represented; and Lady Flower, who was prejudiced in favor of a cosmopolitan education, thought that in Mademoiselle Lucinge she had found the ideal person to correct in her granddaughter the effects of a deplorable upbringing, for which, strange to say, she did not in the least blame herself.

When Mary went to Châteaublanc, she found herself the youngest of thirty-five girls, and it had been agreed between Lady Flower and Mademoiselle that for the first two years she was to spend all her time there. So, when her grandmother bade good-by on the day after her arrival it was to be a long good-by, although it was understood that she might expect a visit whenever Lady Flower should be on her way to Aix.

Mary was too much delighted with the *pension* to feel any sorrow at the prospect of so long a parting. Nor indeed was it to be expected that in barely three months her grandmother would have become indispensable to her happiness. Her new surroundings had already begun even to dim the basement of Paternoster Row. Uncle William and Aunt Lucy were now far away indeed. It would not be long before Mary would begin to remember her past life in a few bright patches like the bright patches of a faded carpet.

A month after Mary had arrived at the *pension* war was declared between France and Prussia. The pupils went home for their summer holidays, and

Mary was left with two girls from South America, both considerably older than herself. During this time Mademoiselle Lucinge took a great deal of trouble with Mary's education and was really more like a private governess in the care she lavished than the proprietress and headmistress of a fashionable school. The war was going so badly for France that it seemed more prudent to close the school that autumn. The two South American girls were sent off to Bordeaux that they might sail thence for home and relieve the minds of their parents who had sent a packet of anxious and excited letters. Mademoiselle Lucinge wrote to her grandmother to ask what she would like Mary to do. Lady Flower wrote back to say that she was convinced that the French defeats were of no importance and that very shortly the Prussians would be driven back over the Rhine. In any case, Paris was no place for her granddaughter, and in Paris she herself must stay to do her work with the Red Cross. Would Mademoiselle keep Mary at Châteaublanc?

Nothing could have fallen out better for Mary. She had now the entire attention of Mademoiselle; she had a beautiful house and beautiful gardens to herself; she had as many books to read as she wanted.

Mademoiselle Lucinge was a devout Catholic, and so were most of her pupils. As regards Mary's religious teaching, Lady Flower let Mademoiselle understand that she had no objection to as much re-

ligion being instilled into her granddaughter as was consonant with her social obligations in days to come; but she particularly requested that no attempt should be made to lure her into Catholicism. The Papacy was very unpopular in England at this period, and Lady Flower would have regarded it as a serious reflection upon her duty as guardian if she had allowed her granddaughter to enter society under such a handicap. She herself privately believed in nothing that was not material, even obvious, but inasmuch as positive scepticism would be considered as unbecoming as Popish extravagance she conformed to the religious mode of the time and expected her granddaughter to do the same.

Mademoiselle had not been a governess in England for ten years without learning how little the English mind being considered eccentric abroad, how much they hate to be thought eccentric at home. At the same time, Mary was the youngest pupil in her school, and she regarded her own duties of guardianship more gravely than Lady Flower regarded hers. Whatever might be Mary's life in days to come, Mademoiselle was determined that she should not be denied in childhood an opportunity to prepare the soul for those deep consolations of religious belief that might one day come to her aid in a time of stress. And Mary loved the quiet hours with Mademoiselle, when in her gray boudoir she spoke to her about God.

One mellow Sunday evening in mid-September,

when the news from the seat of war was as bad as it could be and when Mademoiselle's austere and gracious countenance was lined with care and grief for her country, Mary had been learning the fifth commandment in the catechism of the Church of England:

Honor thy father and thy mother that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

A robin redbreast was singing in the magnolia on the lawn beneath the turret window of Mademoiselle's gray room, and Mary's thoughts on seeing the bird went back to the attic in Paternoster Row, where she had first read of the death of poor Cock Robin. When Mademoiselle's exposition of filial piety was concluded, Mary asked her if she ought to honor her grandmother as much as she would have honored her father and mother were they alive.

"Quite as much, my child," said Mademoiselle.

Mary thought for a moment or two.

"But oughtn't I to honor Mr. and Mrs. Fawcus, who Grandmamma says I mustn't call Uncle William and Aunt Lucy any more?"

It was Mademoiselle's turn to think for a moment.

"You ought to honor their memory," she said at last.

"But why mayn't I write to them and tell them

where I am? And tell about you, Mademoiselle, and what I'm doing and about the garden and the lizards and the white cows who pull the carts and about treading on the grapes and beating the corn with those funny sticks and about my sabots and the melon I have for breakfast? They would like to hear."

Mademoiselle could not bear that the gratitude and affection of a little child should be thus discouraged, although Lady Flower's last words had been to forbid any communication between Mary and her former guardians. In the end she compromised by letting Mary write a letter and writing herself by the same post to Mr. Fawcus, begging him not to reply and explaining the circumstances in which she had allowed Mary to write. It was unlike Mademoiselle to compromise; but she was tormented by the woes of France that autumn and not so much mistress as usual of her judgment or emotions. Her kindly intention did much harm, for when Mary received no answer to her letter she was embittered by the thought that her beloved friends had already forgotten her, and this was the first disillusion of her life.

During this time Mary, with the facility of childhood, learned to speak French, so that before the leaves fell from the trees that year she was as fluent as if she had been living in Châteaublanc from infancy. One day in October—it was soon after the news had arrived of Gambetta's escape from Paris

in a balloon—Mary, wandering in a remote corner of the grounds, discovered a stripling of about sixteen who was digging holes for young trees to be planted in them when the autumn rains should have soaked down into the soil. He was a slim, handsome boy with fine features and dark, silky hair; but it was not his good looks that interested Mary so much as the fact that he seemed to be working in a frenzy of despair.

"Qu'est-ce que tu as?" she demanded.

"J'ai mal au cœur," he replied sullenly, wiping a tear from his eye and bending low over his spade.

"But why are you crying?" she persisted. She spoke in French, of course.

"My tears belong to me," he said. "At least the Prussians have left us our tears."

"Are you the son of our gardener?" she asked.

To this ollendorfian query he nodded.

"Of Monsieur Menard?"

He nodded again.

"Alors, tu es Pierre?"

"Oui, je suis Pierre."

Mary produced an apple from the pocket of the hideous crimson pelisse she was wearing, and while she slowly munched it she regarded the boy with solemn curiosity. She had heard of young Pierre Menard who had run away from home to join the troops that were everywhere being recruited in the provinces to drive the Prussians out of France, and of how his father had found him in the market-place

of Villefranche and brought him back, because he was too young to be a soldier.

"I'm sorry you could not go to be a soldier, Pierre," she said at last. "Would you like the other half of my apple?"

The boy accepted the proffered fruit with a surly grace, and presently he was confiding in Mary the tale of his wrecked ambition.

"If I'm strong enough to plant trees, I'm strong enough to carry a *chassepot,*" he declared. "If I can dig holes for trees, I can dig graves for Prussians."

Mary condoled with him, listened to his tales of the Emperor, not the degenerate captive of the enemy, but the great Napoleon, and lamented with him the glory of which he was being foiled by his father's cruelty.

"We must fight on for years, Gambetta says, and, who knows? I may rise to be a marshal of France before the war comes to an end."

"You might be Emperor," Mary agreed with enthusiasm.

Pierre tried to look modest and disclaim so exalted an ambition as that; but there was in the manner of his disclaimer a suggestion that he did not think such an altitude impossible.

Mary saw a good deal of Pierre, because Mademoiselle who was sorry for the boy raised no objection to her frequenting his company. For a long

time Mary had been anxious to visit the ruined castle on the hill above the town, and on All Saints' Day she begged and obtained permission to be escorted there by Pierre. There was not much left of the old castle beyond crumbling ivy-colored walls and nettle-grown courts, although there was one round tower, which was still almost intact. Below the foundations of this tower was a large *oubliette* bristling with the very spikes which had impaled unhappy prisoners precipitated upon them years ago. Mary and Pierre gazed down with awe through the open trap and imagined that they could still see bones and bloodstains upon the floor thirty feet below. Immediately beside the trap was a small embrasure in the thick walls of the tower lighted by a lancet window through which could be seen a vast expanse of country, meadows and woods and vineyards and that great serpent the Saône. Hither it was that the prisoner condemned to die was led up blinking from the dungeons below to take his last look at France; here he was allowed to spend a few wistful moments; hence he stepped upon the trap to vanish forever from the eyes of men.

There was room for both Mary and Pierre to stand close together in the embrasure and on this holy morn to gaze out at the russet landscape breathless beneath the milky blue of the November sky.

"My little one," said Pierre, "I would rather throw myself down into that *oubliette* than stay here

any longer while France bleeds to death. Hark! Do you hear the sound of drums?"

"Yes, very far away. Trump—trump—trump—trump!" she whispered in awe of the menacing beat.

"Alors, je file!" he cried. "You can find your way home alone?"

"But suppose there are cows on the road?"

"My little one, it is impossible to permit cows to stand in the way of *la patrie et la gloire.* I will conduct you outside the Castle gates and you must find your way home. As for me, this time I will go to the war. *Vive la France!"*

Mary stood in the ruined gateway, waving her hand to Pierre who went running and skipping along the white road after those faint-heard, those elusive drum-taps that might have been anywhere and seemed to be everywhere.

"We shall meet again after the war," he had called back to her.

Mademoiselle sent for Monsieur Menard and begged him not to interfere again with his son's desire to serve France, and she was so eloquent that Monsieur Menard gave way. But when peace was signed, Pierre did not come back to Châteaublanc, because his father vowed that there would be no doing anything with him nowadays. So through the interest of one of Mademoiselle's patrons he was found a clerkship in the English branch of a

big French commercial house, and Mary did not see him again in Châteaublanc.

But he was her first romance, and the memory of Pierre did not fade quickly, even when Mademoiselle's house was full of girls again and Mary's real school life began.

Chapter Three

THE MAIDEN

Chapter Three: The Maiden

ON a January afternoon, the afternoon of her twentieth birthday, Mary Flower stood by the drawing-room windows of a house in King's Gate, staring out across the Knightsbridge road to where in soot and snow the trees of Hyde Park were etched upon a gray expanse of sky. The house was very still, for it was the time when old Lady Flower took her daily nap, to the routine of which she attributed the vitality that enabled her at seventy to sustain the exertion of arranging an advantageous marriage for her granddaughter. To-day lunch had been protracted to celebrate with various dishes Mary's birthday, and to-night a dinner-party was to be followed by a musical reception. The house, seeming to conspire with her ladyship's snores, achieved a stillness that was even more perceptible than usual.

Mary's meditations were neither so profound nor so romantic as any passer-by that looked up and glimpsed the form of that beautiful young woman in her glass world might have imagined. Mostly they were directed to her new evening gown, a polonaise snatched it might almost be said prematurely by Lady Flower from the most fashionable of

Parisian costumiers. Mary dreamed of its *passementerie* of beads and ruching of Honiton lace, and then with heightened color of the amount of bare arm it must reveal. She supposed that her grandmother was right and that she should display as much of the upper part of her arm without risk of censorious comment, but . . .

Mary wished that Daisy Harland had come up from the country yesterday instead of waiting until to-night to wish her best friend many happy returns of the day. Daisy's opinion would have been so valuable. Daisy was so advanced, so unconventional, and yet always so right. But then Grandmamma, too, was always right, and Grandmamma had deliberately chosen the dress. Mary gave up bothering about the problem, which was no problem at all really, because she must obviously take Grandmamma's advice as long as Grandmamma was alive to give it. And if Grandmamma should die? Why, then, in this great house she, Mary Flower, should be all alone! No wonder Grandmamma was anxious for her to be safely married. Marriage? That was indeed something to talk about with her friend. If only the frost would hold so that Daisy might be resigned to stay in London for a while and spend hours in discussing marriage. Not of course as the topic had been discussed at school, where nobody knew anything for certain and the horridest girls vied with one another in dreadful propoundings. No, not like that, but seriously, almost religiously

—if one could compare two things so far asunder as religion and marriage.

Mary contemplated the prospect of marriage with several of the men who visited the house in King's Gate. None of them considered thus made her feel at all anxious to be married; rather did each one present himself to her fancy like an unknown bottle of medicine, the efficacy of which was guaranteed but of the niceness or nastiness of which there was nothing to be learned from its external appearance. It was not that Mary had never imagined herself in love. Like most schoolgirls she had cherished impossible loyalties and sentimental passions; but the figures upon which these had been bestowed were like the figures in a picture book or the remote incarnations that are begotten by music. Love was an aspiration to a life beyond the present, a kind of yearning upon immortality; it was never a practical guide to the humdrum, the yet so intricate humdrum, of existence; it had nothing at all to do with marriage.

Lady Flower was responsible for this attitude of her granddaughter. By living so much in Paris, by allowing the French half of her character to recover from years of discouragement by her husband, and by brooding over her son's *mésalliance*—it was typical of the sentimental English that they should have to borrow the right word from France—the old lady felt herself more and more definitely inclined to the *mariage de convenance.* She never let pass an

opportunity to impress upon Mary its superiority.

"Love, my dear child," she would tell her, "is an invention of the poets to excuse their own weaknesses."

This afternoon, as Mary stared out across the wintry park, love did seem a long way off from King's Gate, and marriage, for all it was such a mystery, did seem comparatively near.

"Though suppose nobody ever does propose to me?" Mary thought. She turned round for reassurance from the large gilded mirror over the mantelpiece, and wished that she had never seen herself in a glass before, so that she could arrive at a decision about her beauty. Was she beautiful? If with six other girls she stood before a mirror for the first time, so that she did not know which was herself, should she think herself beautiful? But she should know which was herself, because she should recognize the other girls, and the stranger in the middle would be herself.

"Oh, am I or am I not beautiful?" she asked aloud of her reflection, standing motionless in that frozen, reflected room where nothing was alive except the swift pendulum of the ormulu clock on the wall behind her. "Am I or am I not beautiful?" she repeated with a sigh, as she took her place once more by the window and gazed out at the black and white trees in the Park, beneath whose filigree of boughs people were wandering in couples upon the powdered grass, walking so slowly that they must

be happy, Mary thought. She was filled with envy of those shadows beyond the railings, who could upon this cold January afternoon pace up and down with such unhurried steps. They surely must be lovers, who could find delight in this chill and somber air, who could stroll arm in arm about this landscape that was sinking beneath the weight of a leaden sky. There opposite, two shadows were actually sitting upon a bench, sitting as close as birds sit upon a perch at dusk. They must love each other very deeply and very dearly, to endure the cold, very deeply and very dearly to stay there away from the firelight. Beautiful firelight, Mary thought; and she watched for a while its diminished reflection lambent within the milky windowpanes.

"*Miladi* is awake, Mademoiselle," said Adèle, coming into the room.

The canaries that lived in the domed conservatory at the back of the drawing-room began to sing. The depression of the long silence was broken.

Mary ran up the cheerful gaslit stairs to her grandmother.

Lady Flower had tried to neutralize the fretwork of age by excess of lace. She was still ivory; but the ivory was scratched, here and there even badly cracked. The texture of lace seemed more likely than any other to distract the attention of the observer, to confuse him by its infinite reticulation and thus provide an illusive calendry for that wrinkled countenance of hers.

"Well, dear," she began at once, sitting up among the pillows when Mary came into the room. "I slept much better than I expected after those grated chestnuts we had for your birthday lunch. I have an impression of dreaming a good deal, but I've forgotten what about. So much the better, for there is nobody so irritating as a *raconteur des rêves*."

Mary had been half inclined to tell Lady Flower about her own dreams by the window; but she was deterred by this remark, and perhaps in any case she would have been too much afraid of the old lady's cynical toleration to expose those fleeting and intangible shades of romantic love to her sparrowy eyes and pecks.

"I'm glad you feel rested," she said.

"Thank you, my dear."

They were always very courteous to each other, these two, or rather Lady Flower was always very courteous to her granddaughter. Mary was dutiful; and Lady Flower accepted any hint of affection, any display of sympathy or consideration, as the fruit of a good upbringing. She had no qualms about the younger generation. In the estimation of Lady Flower young people existed to show respect and do their duty toward their elders. Youth and labor at this period were still in bondage.

"I have invited more people than I intended for this evening," Lady Flower went on. "I was anxious to give you an opportunity of seeing various aspects of contemporary life."

"How kind of you, Grandmamma."

"Nothing to thank me for; I am doing no more than my duty."

Lady Flower made this admission a trifle unwillingly; but she thought it right to let Mary understand that, as she grew older, she, too, would find duty dogging her like a shadow. She must not be allowed to suppose that marriage meant freedom.

"Yes," she continued complacently, "I have invited several artistic people. They seem to be getting themselves a good deal talked about nowadays, and I felt you ought to meet some of them. By the way, Mr. Alison is coming."

"I'm glad," said Mary. "He's very nice."

"Very nice, indeed," her grandmother agreed emphatically. "And very much *beau garçon*. About thirty-five," she went on, meditating aloud. "About thirty-five, and extremely well off. He wrote to me that he was returning from the Continent on purpose to be present at your birthday party. I must say I find that highly significant."

"Significant of what?"

"My dear, innocence is a charming and attractive quality; but do not be too *ingénue*. No, not too *ingénue*. At any rate with me. You must surely have noticed how *empressé* he has always been with you? He admires you, and though of course I do not wish to influence you unduly or to persuade you into a hasty marriage, at the same time . . . however, there are others every bit as suitable as Mr.

Alison. I just happen to have noticed that he is rather obviously . . . however, please, my dear child, pay no attention to what I was saying, because I should be unwilling, oh, yes, most unwilling, to precipitate a marriage with anybody, even a young man so perfectly eligible as Mr. Alison. At the same time, you are twenty, are you not? And I am seventy. You will of course inherit a comfortable sum when I die, but that makes it all the more imperative to choose for your husband a man who has money."

Mary did not quite see the logic of this; but she had long ago been successfully cured of asking why; and, since the prospect of marrying Mr. Alison was at least as pleasant as the prospect of marrying anybody else, she was not sufficiently interested to pursue the topic.

But Mr. Alison took Mary into dinner; Lady Flower felt that he deserved some reward for hurrying back from Nice.

James Alison, known generally as Jemmie Alison, was a stockbroker who had succeeded at the age of twenty-seven to a lucrative business. As a boy, when he had fair, curly hair, he had been definitely handsome. He was now a florid man with a heavy fair mustache, who was still good-looking, although his hair was beginning to require some arranging before it would cover the top of his head, and his features showed signs of coarsening. From his schooldays at Eton, indeed from the day he was

born, he had never been compelled to deny himself anything, and like many men who have inherited a fortune early in life he looked older than he was and felt older than he looked. After dinner he was separated from Mary for some time; but at last he managed to find a seat beside her in the conservatory while a famous tenor was singing:

I had a message to send her,
To her, whom my soul loved best;
But I had my task to finish,
And she has gone home to rest.

"Beautiful song," said Mr. Alison.

"Exquisite!" Mary sighed.

I had a message to send her,
So tender, and true, and sweet,
I longed for an Angel to bear it,
And lay it down at her feet.

"Things can be said in songs that can't be said any other way," Mr. Alison murmured with a sigh.

Mary appeared wrapt in the melody.

I cried, in my passionate longing;—
"Has the earth no Angel-friend
Who will carry my love the message
That my heart desires to send?"

Mr. Alison looked appealingly at Mary; but she was still wrapt in the melody.

Then I heard a strain of music,
So mighty, so pure, so clear,
That my very sorrow was silent,
And my heart stood still to hear.

"One of the loveliest songs I ever heard," Mr. Alison declared. "And he sings it divinely."

And I tenderly laid my message
On the music's outspread wings.

I heard it float farther and farther,
In sound more perfect than speech;
Farther than sight can follow,
Farther than soul can reach.

Mary with a tear in each eye was staring up at the dome of the conservatory. Mr. Alison, although he could not muster a tear even in one eye, looked in the same direction and derived a great deal of satisfaction from the thought that he and this beautiful girl by his side were both staring at the same pane of glass. The singer achieved a triumphant C.

And I know that at last my message
Has passed through the golden gate;
So my heart is no longer restless,
And I am content to wait.

" 'Content to wait,' " Mr. Alison echoed meaningly, when the applause had died down. " 'Content

to wait,'" he repeated. "So long as I know that somebody has received my message."

Mary was nearly sure that this was a declaration; but she was not absolutely sure, and she wished that Daisy Harland had not at the last moment telegraphed to say that she could not be with her beloved Mary on her twentieth birthday.

"Ah, Miss Flower," Mr. Alison continued, shaking his head. "It would be hard for you to understand the thoughts of a man like myself when he hears a song like that. At the same time, the moral of it surely is that, however far away we may seem from heaven, we are not so far away in reality. We can hope. We can hope, Miss Flower. I wonder if I might venture to say Mary?"

"Oh, certainly, please call me Mary," she begged him nervously.

"Thank you, Mary."

Mr. Alison wished that he could quote a line of poetry about some romantic Mary; but he could only think of *Mary had a little lamb.* And he felt that to sigh this forth with as much passionate emphasis as he could achieve would sound rather silly.

"I suppose," he ventured, "you couldn't bring yourself to call me Jemmie? All my chums call me Jemmie. Jemmie Alison. Nobody ever calls me James. Nobody ever did call me James except my grandmother on my father's side. Funny old woman. She simply would not call me Jemmie. She always said the name reminded her of a fright she

had in childhood when some burglars broke into her father's house, who of course would have been my great-grandfather. Now that's going back some way. My father died in '72. He was sixty-three then. So he was born in 1809, when my grandmother was twenty-one. That makes her born in 1788. So I suppose this burglary must have happened about 1798. That's a long time ago, isn't it?"

"A very long time ago," Mary agreed. She was so much muddled by Mr. Alison's statistics that if he had told her the burglary took place shortly after the Battle of Hastings she would have accepted it as a fact.

"I wish the old lady could have lived to meet you, Mary," he went on. "You are just the kind of girl she would have liked me to marry."

Luckily for Mary, who did not know what comment she ought to make on this last piece of information, by this time the tenor was off again:

Do you grieve no costly offering
To the lady you can make?
One there is, and gifts less worthy
Queens have stooped to take.

Take a Heart of virgin silver,
Fashion it with heavy blows,
Cast it into Love's hot furnace
When it fiercest glows.

"Is that your heart or mine?" Mr. Alison asked in a puzzled voice. "I don't quite get that. I mean, is that his heart or hers?"

Mary motioned him not to talk, because people were beginning to turn round and peer at the palms among which they were sitting, curious to know what discordant mutter was profaning the music.

With pain's sharpest point transfix it,
And then carve in letters fair,
Tender dreams and quaint devices,
Fancies sweet and rare.

Set within it Hope's blue sapphire,
Many-changing, opal fears,
Blood-red ruby-stones of daring,
Mixed with pearly tears.

"Hope's red ruby!" exclaimed Mr. Alison. "That's really uncommonly fine, I think."

And when you have wrought and labored
Till the gift is all complete,
You may humbly lay your offering
At the Lady's feet.

Should her mood perchance be gracious—
With disdainful smiling pride,
She will place it with the trinkets
Glittering at her side.

"I got muddled in that song," Mr. Alison confessed. "I don't think it's as good as the first one.

Mary, before another song begins, may I tell you that I love you? May I ask you to be my wife? I know that you do not love me yet. But you might learn to love me. Mightn't you, Mary? You're very young. I can wait, now that I have delivered my message at the golden gate. Now I shall always reverence that song, Mary. To my dying day. It seems to me sitting here beside you at this moment more like a sacred song than just ordinary poetry. I wonder who wrote it?"

"I wonder," echoed Mary, glad to find the conversation turning away from personalities to literature.

"I suppose it wasn't Shakespeare?" Mr. Alison hazarded.

"No, I don't *think* it was Shakespeare."

"He wrote such a lot of well-known stuff," said Mr. Alison. "One's pretty safe five times out of ten to guess Shakespeare. But, Mary, you have not replied to my question. May I hope? May I set in my heart Hope's red ruby?"

"It was Hope's blue sapphire," she corrected.

"Well, whatever jewel it was, may I hope?"

"I hadn't expected anything like this," said Mary, wondering whether it would create general consternation if she were to jump up from her seat and rush out of the conservatory.

"I know it seems sudden; but it's not really so sudden. All the time I've been in the south of France I've been thinking about you. I tried to

drown my despair by playing roulette. In fact, I won quite a lot of money, because I played so recklessly."

Mary turned pale. Could her existence really affect a man of the world like Mr. Alison up to the point of reckless gambling?

"I felt in my inmost being that you could not love me. You're as much above me as a—as a—as an angel!" He tried not to look proud of the simile. "I know I am not worthy of you, Mary. I know that. But I have said enough. You look agitated. Please do not let my impetuosity distress you. Hark! Somebody else is going to sing."

The deep notes of a voluptuous contralto broke into the murmur of small talk like a dinner-gong.

"Don't forget, Mary," said Mr. Alison, when the sonorous abracadabra of an Italian song had died away in loud applause. "I have delivered my message, and I am content to wait. Shall I take you downstairs and get you an ice?"

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Alison."

"Mary, please!" he moaned reproachfully. "Jemmie. I thought you'd promised me that much."

It was lucky the ices were downstairs; for his tone would have melted the lot had they been in the conservatory.

"Jemmie," she whispered, feeling exactly as if she had swallowed a pill without water.

"You have made me radiantly happy," he af-

firmed. "By Jove, I feel as if I never knew my name *was* Jemmie until this moment."

As for Mary, she felt nothing except a vague hope that she had not committed herself too deeply by granting Mr. Alison's desire to be called Jemmie. Her grandmother might choose to consider that by doing so she had accepted him. She prayed that Daisy Harland would soon reach London. Otherwise, at this rate, she would find herself married before she knew it.

For the rest of the evening she managed to avoid her suitor, though it was at the cost of having to endure the dissertative bibble-babble upon Japanese interiors of a young man with long hair and a double chin, one of those artistic people whom the hostess had invited to her reception in order to support a daring social experiment that was having a vogue.

"Did Mr. Alison give you an amusing account of his tour in France?" Lady Flower inquired after the sound of the last carriage had died away on the frosty air.

"He talked about France. He wasn't very amusing," said Mary.

"You seemed to be getting on very well together, nevertheless," observed her grandmother. "In fact, when What's-his-name, the tenor, was singing it was really quite noticeable that you were too much occupied with each other to pay any attention to the music."

"We were discussing the music," Mary said, wish-

ing that her grandmother would go to bed, and not ask any more questions.

"I suppose that if he does seriously intend to ask for your hand he will speak to me first. He's not so young as to be able to neglect that courtesy. He's not one of the young communards of to-day who consider they have equal rights with parents and guardians. He'll be ready to admit that we elders have some authority left. Only fancy, my dear, Lady Pringle tells me that her daughters demand, yes, positively demand, to play in a lawn-tennis competition next summer. A public affair, as far as I can make out. She made me shudder with her description of it. Young women of breeding and education are to expose themselves in front of anybody who likes to pay the necessary charge for admission. Dear me, I remember that your poor grandfather used sometimes to be shocked by what he considered my ultra-modern and extravagantly continental ideas. What would he have said, had he been alive to-day? I do hope your friend, Daisy Harland, won't persuade *you* into wanting to appear as a female acrobat. She has always struck me as the kind of young woman who would do anything. She was a dreadfully noisy girl, I remember."

Mary allowed Daisy's character to be sacrificed in order to divert her grandmother from the discussion of Mr. Alison. Soon she was able to propose bed and was glad when at last she found herself alone in the dark with her secret.

Her first proposal . . .

Only that afternoon she had been wondering if any one would propose to her, and already on her twentieth birthday she had received one.

Jemmie . . .

But she did not think of him as Jemmie. Were she to become his wife to-morrow, she should for a long time think of him as Mr. Alison.

Mary Alison . . .

That was rather attractive.

Mrs. Alison . . .

It was in his favor that he had neither father nor mother alive. If she did make up her mind to marry him, she should not want another grandmamma in her mother-in-law.

Mary Alison . . . yours most truly, Mary Alison . . .

But marriage meant more than that. Rather horrid intimacies . . . children . . .

"Do I want children?" Mary asked herself. "I don't believe I do at all."

Pain! And of course, unless she had been utterly misinformed, it must hurt horribly.

"I should never have the courage," she told herself. "Never," she decided, and turning over she was soon fast asleep.

A week later, Daisy Harland did come to London, and to her in that top room of the Harlands' house in South Kensington, in that room papered with hunting scenes, which was bound up more

closely with her girlhood than any room in the world, Mary confided the tale of her first proposal.

"He's not so bad," Daisy commented. "He's clean to look at. Pretty well off too, I should say. But why be in a hurry?"

"Oh, I'm not in any hurry. It's my grandmother who is so anxious to see me safely married."

"I wonder why. I suppose she can't bear the idea of not arranging the whole matter to please herself."

Mary gazed down at the garden of the Square, in which little girls well wrapped up in white furs were running about after large particolored balls of india rubber, while their nurses gossiped gravely with one another, moving with slow and stately tread behind their perambulators. What fun she and Daisy had always had in the Square when she used to stay with her friend for the holidays! Perhaps it was the bareness of winter that made it seem so small nowadays; or perhaps everything shrank as one grew older.

"Don't you think that a girl ought to love the man she is going to marry?" Mary pressed.

"But what is love? Personally I've never been in love."

"Daisy! You were tremendously in love with Gerald Ashworth. Don't you remember when you bought that lilac notepaper with two hearts stamped in the top corner?"

Her friend laughed.

"You don't think seriously that the kind of silliness in which one indulges at fifteen is to be considered an experience?"

"Yes, I do," Mary insisted. "If I hadn't been in love when I was small, I shouldn't be bothering now about being in love with Jemmie Alison. I shouldn't expect anything. As it is, I feel somehow that I want more than he can give me."

"If you'd come back with me to Berkshire and hunt, you'd soon forget all your troubles."

"Should I? I wonder. Not by hunting, Daisy. You would not enjoy hunting so much, if you weren't so proud of yourself for learning to ride so late in life."

"I wish we'd had our place in Berkshire when I was little," said Daisy regretfully. "I *should* have been a horsewoman then. The pater might just as well have launched out a bit earlier. We didn't really save anything by living in London."

"But it was fun when we used to play up here," said Mary. "Do you remember when we made those paper boxes and filled them with ink and dropped them on the pavement? Oh, and don't you remember when Eustace Arnesby came to tea, and he dropped one on an old gentleman's hat?"

"Eustace is at Sandhurst now," said Daisy. "Talking of young love, I did have rather a pash for him."

"Daisy!"

"What's the matter?"

"You do say such terrible things."

"In fact," Daisy continued, "when I look back at my innocent girlhood, I seem to have spent my time falling in and falling out of love with lanky boys. And you, my darling Mary, are trying to make out that that kind of thing is serious. Well, if it was, my young life has been lived, for at present I couldn't fall in love with anybody."

"I believe I could," said Mary meditatively. "But not with Jemmie Alison. If you really think about it, marriage is terrible."

"Why?"

Here was Mary's opportunity to ask Daisy a few direct questions; but, when it came to the point, she could not bring herself to do so. She could not imagine that she would ever feel more intimate with any other girl than she felt with Daisy, and if she could not ask Daisy she could not ask anybody.

"Why?" her friend repeated.

"Oh, always being with the same person," said Mary, with this explanation allowing the opportunity to pass.

Daisy went back to her hunting; Mary remained in London.

"We might go to Ventnor in March," said Lady Flower. "I don't feel inclined to travel far. I really believe that I'm beginning to feel old. I wish I could see you safely married. You strike me as being somewhat listless in your manner. That would vanish if you were married."

Jemmie Alison ventured to think that Mary was not looking quite herself. He would have been glad to suggest the same remedy as Lady Flower; but he lacked the courage and compromised.

"What you want is a dog," he decided. "A nice little dog. Give you an excuse for taking a walk every morning in the Park. I should like to think of you with your little dog under the trees when I'm working in my office."

Jemmie Alison proved that he had faith in his prescription by taking a great deal of trouble to procure for Mary the very dog for the purpose—a wise Dandie Dinmont not so young as to require the elements of training, yet not so old as to be fretting for a former mistress or master.

"He is called Mac. You don't dislike that name?" the donor asked.

Mary said that she thought it was a most suitable name.

"There's so much in a name," he continued meaningly.

"Yes, and it's so unlucky, I always think, to change a name," Mary added.

"Oh, you think it's unlucky?" Jemmie Alison asked in a gloomy tone.

Mac was a success from the moment of his arrival, and Mary was really grateful to her friend —friendship was the relation established between her and Jemmie Alison after several discussions—for the kind thought that made the dog hers. She

was glad when the need of exercising Mac took her out into Hyde Park where by now, crocuses, a myriad steady flames, defied the wind and lighted the dim green of the London grass. There were also white and purple crocuses that gave Mary a keener pleasure than the yellow ones, for they seemed to be not so much the first flowers of Spring as the last flowers of Winter, and to express with their cold hues and tranquillity of form the sharpness of life that was there all the time. They reminded her somehow of those lovers who wandered about in the iron chill of that January afternoon, those regardful lovers whose happy indifference to time or weather she had so greatly envied.

One morning the sun was so warm that, tired with throwing sticks for Mac, Mary sat down on a chair in the Broad Walk, watching the children bowling their hoops or running about with pink and blue balloons, while with one splay paw upon his mistress's instep Mac sat watching the other dogs. Mary from paying attention to the children and nurses fell to wondering about the fragments of shell that were mixed with the fresh gravel of the path. From what far-off beach had they come, or were they fossil shells from the bed of a long-receded ocean? Whencesoever it came, each fragment had once been part of a living animal. A living animal. Not a hundred years hence, she, or all that part of her beheld now by the passers-by, would seem not more important than one of these shells.

Was there not indeed something more permanent than this bodily husk? Grandmamma did not think so. Mary was sure of her unbelief, even if every Sunday morning Grandmamma in sealskin and dove-gray silk did make use of the pew she rented for herself and Mary in St. Peter's, Knightsbridge.

"You are seen in church," she told her granddaughter. "One is anxious for you to be seen."

With the help of her vinaigrette Lady Flower kept awake during the sermon and congratulated herself upon the charming appearance of Mary, when Mary rose to take her share of singing unto the Lord at Morning Prayer.

The notion that her granddaughter was contemplating the serious aspect and expression of religious fervor would have shocked the old lady; the knowledge that she was sitting in Kensington Gardens asking herself what she really was would have made Lady Flower think more earnestly than ever that it was high time her granddaughter was married.

"It must be for something," Mary told herself, crushing a tiny scalloped fragment with her toe. "Life must be meant for something."

Any attempt to solve the riddle of the universe had to be postponed on account of Mac's suddenly being involved in a desperate fight, for while his mistress had been lost in meditation he had been exposed to the insults of an aggressive fox terrier.

"Bandy-legged Sawney!" the terrier had murmured when he trotted fussily past with erect tail.

Mac's ears had twitched under this reflection upon his nationality; but he had restrained himself. Presently the terrier had come trotting back, this time on three legs as if to insinuate that he was a better dog on three legs than a Dandie Dinmont on four.

"Donkey's ears!" he had snarled.

Even this Mac had endured in patience, for his splay paw was still reposing on his mistress' instep and he was proud of the pose, too proud to abandon it for a fox-terrier. But, when his mistress had of her own accord released him by withdrawing her toe from his protection, Mac had been able to stand no more.

"Let him come back and say another word," he had growled to himself, turning round and round and scratching up the gravel in his irritation. The fox-terrier had trotted back more aggressive than ever and to emphasize his contempt of the Dandie Dinmont's short legs he had swaggered up and down in front of Mac on the tips of his paws, boastfully snarling.

Mac rushed in, and the fight began.

The nearest children climbed hastily over the railings to the safety of the grass: nurses screamed to their charges: a park-keeper looked out of the window of his little green room and made ready to effect an impressive arrival upon the scene when the fight was over.

"Your dog began it," a weather-beaten woman

said angrily to Mary. "I call all and sundry to witness that it was your dog who deliberately made an attack upon mine. Trusty! Trusty! Oh, my poor Trusty, he'll be killed. That other brute's got him down. He's being bitten to pieces, my poor old Trusty!"

Mary was hitting both dogs with her whip-lead; but although she felt that she was using most unfeminine force, such force that the ribbons of her bonnet came untied and at any moment she expected to find her hair loose upon her shoulders, her blows had not the slightest effect upon the dogs. The owner of the fox-terrier was exciting herself more every moment, and Mary was afraid that presently she should find herself being rolled over and over among those fragments of shells, her preoccupation with which had been the cause of Mac's outburst. However, the Dandie Dinmont was certainly winning; and if the weather-beaten lady did attack her, perhaps he would have disposed of the fox-terrier in time to rescue his mistress. At that moment a slim young man rushed into the middle of the fray and, seizing both dogs by their tails, he held them apart until he had returned them growling to the arms of their owners.

"You can think yourself lucky that I don't take out a summons against you," said the owner of the fox-terrier, hurrying off, without a word of thanks to the young man, to bathe Trusty's wounds at the nearest fountain.

He was a dark young man with fine features and deep brown eyes, who spoke English with a French accent.

"Pardon, Mademoiselle, we have not met before, have we?" he asked, looking hard at Mary.

She thought that he was trying to improve the occasion and was on the point of replying with a cold negative, when she began to wonder where and how she had met this stranger before. In his frankly puzzled stare there was not a hint of presumption, and, though to enter into conversation with a young man who had rendered her a service in a public park was contrary to the whole spirit of her bringing up, Mary could not resist her curiosity.

"Have we met before?" she asked. "I've a feeling that we have somewhere. You are French, are you not?"

"From the Lyonnais," he replied.

"But that's where I was at school."

"I lived in Châteaublanc," he continued.

In a flash she remembered who he was.

"Pierre Menard!" she cried.

"And you are the little English girl with—pardon, Mademoiselle—with red hair."

When two old friends meet after a long lapse of time, the years between are either swept away altogether or their capacity for separation is doubled. In this case they were obliterated. Here on this fine morning in early March Pierre stood before Mary as many times he had stood in the fair land-

scapes of memory. She heard again the diminishing sound of the drum that played him on to glory down that winding road ten years ago; she stood again beside him in that embrasure, gazing at a world washed with the gold of that breathless and mellow autumn day; she saw him again in heroic guise and found in his handling of the dog-fight such an inspired chivalry as she had found in his setting forth to fight for France.

"And how well you speak English, Monsieur."

"I have lived in London for eight years. I'm working with Marechal et Cie, the big silk merchants. I had some business to transact in Kensington and took the opportunity of walking through the Gardens this beautiful day."

"Then I must not detain you," she murmured.

With a gesture he disposed of any urgency in his business.

"You were in a greater hurry last time we were together," Mary reminded him.

She blushed at the adverb she had used, for it seemed to sweep them toward an intimacy that she felt was imprudent.

"I was not old enough last time, Mademoiselle, to appreciate my good fortune. And you were, if I may say so, a very little girl in those days, Mademoiselle."

While they were talking, they had moved away from the populous Broad Walk and were wandering now through a grove of elms. Mary looking

round realized that they were as much alone together as if they were in the country. Yet not for anything would she have been anywhere else, not for anything would she have missed this new music in the twittering of the sparrows overhead, this fresh glow in the grass, this sudden accord of herself with the Spring.

"I ought really to be going home," she murmured. "I only came out to give my little dog a run."

"See how much he is enjoying himself on the grass. I could never have the heart to deprive him of a moment's pleasure, Mademoiselle. I should indeed be *ingrat.*"

They were wandering deeper into the green heart of the Gardens. Mary, looking over her shoulder, saw the houses of Kensington lose themselves in a mist of bare boughs, heard the traffic sound more faintly, ceased to feel the slightest desire to solve the riddle of the universe, and threw all the responsibility of her behavior upon Fate.

"I've felt for a long time that something was about to happen," she told herself deliberately without being the least aware of inconsistency, who only half an hour ago was feeling drearily that nothing was going to happen. What nice hands Pierre had . . . she pulled herself up for a moment, but a moment later asked herself indignantly by what other name she should think of him. He had always been Pierre. Why did he keep staring sideways at

her without speaking? She must be careful to appear utterly unconscious of his glances.

"I'm trying to tell myself that you are grown up," Pierre said.

It was so easy to think of him as Pierre. Monsieur Menard would sound so affected, and Mr. Menard would sound ridiculous.

"I am grown up. I'm twenty."

What would Grandmamma say if she could hear her? Yet after all he must know within a year or two how old she was, so why pretend?

"I am twenty-seven."

"I think you look older than that," Mary said judicially. "I should have guessed you were thirty, if I had not known that you were scarcely seventeen when you went off to the war."

Mary felt that it was important to impress on Pierre how much she was aware of that boy and girl friendship. It would never do for him to think that she would have allowed herself to walk with him under these trees because he was what he was now. No sooner had she decided this than she felt a sharp desire to glance sideways at him, to see more exactly what he was indeed now. She tried hard to resist the impulse, but the longer she resisted the more urgent it became, and thus their eyes met.

She blushed in confusion, but an instant afterward turned pale with emotion.

"Mademoiselle, you are ill," he cried. "Sit here

awhile. The sun is shining. You will not catch cold."

Why did he call her Mademoiselle? Why did he not say "Mary"? Oh, she must not think such thoughts. Probably he did not know her name, or if he ever knew it he must have forgotten it long ago. He was behaving so well, and she was behaving so badly.

"I don't know what you must think of me," she murmured.

"Mademoiselle, I should not dare to say so soon what I thought."

"Is your opinion of me as bad as all that?" She was behaving like a coquette. What was happening to her? Mac's fight must have upset her more than she thought.

"You are unkind to me," said Pierre with a shrug.

"Unkind?" she echoed.

"You taunt me with my position . . ." He broke off and began to play with the dog.

Already a quarrel. How exciting life became when one could quarrel!

"You misunderstand me, Monsieur," Mary said with a dignity that she hoped was a match for his. "I had not the least intention of taunting you. Perhaps you are trying to persuade yourself into thinking that, because you are afraid that you may have led me to suppose that you were more interested in thinking about me than you really were."

"I am too much interested in you," Pierre retorted. "And you with the cruelty of your sex have perceived that too quickly. But you are right to make it clear to me that you have only condescended to give me your company . . . Ah, Mademoiselle, do you think I have forgotten that when you first met me I was the gardener's son?"

So he was! But he was French. And France was now a republic where all were equal.

"I remember perfectly what you were," said Mary. "But I don't remember that it made any difference to me when I was ten, and I don't see why it should make any difference when I'm twenty."

"Mademoiselle," cried Pierre, starting to his feet, "I entreat you not to mock me. I have no right to say what I feel for you. But at least I may beg you to spare my feelings."

"You really do speak English quite perfectly," Mary exclaimed in obvious, open-eyed admiration of his fluency.

"Mademoiselle, if I should wish to change my employer, I would beg you to give me a written testimonial."

"Ah, now it's you who are sneering at me," said Mary, turning upon Pierre reproachful eyes.

He made a gesture that was intended to convey how little it mattered to her what he did or what he said or what he thought. Who was he in her world?

Mary felt that it would give quite a wrong im-

pression of herself if she did not succeed in convincing him that she despised those artificial barriers of rank and station to which he evidently supposed she attached so much importance.

"I assure you that I never was and never could be conscious of any difference between us like that," she affirmed. "I look upon you as an old friend whom Fate—Fate," she repeated emphatically, for she felt that it was imperative to make it clear from the start that Fate was going to be accounted culpable for anything that might happen, "whom Fate has brought once more into my life. I should never have allowed myself to take this walk with you alone, if I didn't consider you an old friend. And now I'm sure you ought to be keeping your appointment. It would never do for you to neglect your business on my account."

"But shall we ever meet again?" he asked.

"Fate will decide that," answered Mary demurely. "I dare say, if your business brings you this way sometimes, we shall meet."

And of course they did meet, not once but many times that Spring.

"It was really a happy thought of Mr. Alison's to give you that odd-looking dog," Lady Flower observed. "Your color is much better since you've made a habit of exercising that dog in the Park. I really don't think you'll want to leave town until the season is over. And I shall not be sorry for an excuse to stay where I am. I find these short ex-

cursions into the country rather a bore nowadays."

"I'm perfectly well in London," Mary assured her grandmother. "I think it would be a great mistake to go away."

Mary did not meet Pierre in the Park every day, but she did meet him very often; and, although at the back of her mind she had a suspicion that he must be neglecting his business to be able to meet her as often as he did, she allowed herself to suppose that it was Fate. And if ever before her mirror she was tempted by honesty to ask herself what was going to be the end of it, she always hurried down to dinner and left Fate to argue it out upstairs. Her friend Daisy had been back in town a long time before Mary gave the least hint of an interest in life. In fact, if she had not met Pierre unexpectedly one morning when she was out walking with Daisy, she would probably never have said anything about her romance.

"So that's why you find Jemmie Alison so dull," her friend laughed.

"My dear, what has he got to do with Jemmie Alison?"

"A great deal, I should imagine, by your blushes."

"Did I never tell you about young Menard, when we were at the *pension?*"

Daisy shook her head.

"Of course, it happened before you came. When I was there during the war." She related briefly the tale of Pierre's determination to fight for his coun-

try. "And the other day we met again quite by accident."

"And no doubt will go on meeting quite by accident," said Daisy dryly.

"I must take Mac somewhere," Mary protested.

Two days later she met Pierre by the banks of the Serpentine on a May noon that held the city in a web of silver. The tall houses of Bayswater, reflected in that shimmering expanse of water, appeared like the battlements of an enchanted palace above the trees that masked their prosaic beginnings. The white peacocks haunting the slopes toward Hyde Park made one feel that life was a dream and that the children and nurses, the meditative loiterers, even the old maids with their pet dogs, would all presently be turned into birds to fly above this cloud-cuckoo-town of London.

No sooner were they seated on two of those green chairs, which in their emptiness speak as eloquently as musical instruments of latent emotions, than Pierre took Mary's hand and said: "Mademoiselle, I have given up Marechal et Cie. Presently I shall find something better to do. But so long as I was their *employé* I could not tell you that I loved you. At this moment I am poor, but I am free. Mary, I hope you will love me until I can win you in marriage?"

She let her hand remain in his. Citizen and citizeness of cloud-cuckoo-town, they floated far above ordinary life.

"I only know that I love you, Pierre," she whispered.

He bent over and touched her fingers with his lips. Then for a long time they sat in silence.

"You had better come and speak to my grandmother this afternoon."

He nodded pensively.

"She might raise some difficulties," Mary went on, trying to realize that there was another existence outside the serene and silver world in which the beating of her own heart sounded so loud. "Come about four," she said, rising. "I will explain how all this has happened."

He kissed once more her hand and stood watching her as she floated across the level grass toward home.

It was only when Mary heard the door of the house in King's Gate close behind her and the gong chime for lunch that she began to wonder if it was all going to be as easy as it had seemed by the banks of the pale blue Serpentine. However, Pierre was coming this afternoon, and Grandmamma must be warned. Lunch was surely unusually disturbed to-day. The maids were always in and out with new dishes. Perhaps it would be best to wait until they went up to the drawing-room for coffee. Would that mean Grandmamma's missing her nap? If it did, it could not be helped. At least she must be told that there was such a person.

"Did I ever tell you about a boy called Pierre

Menard?" Mary asked when she had poured out the coffee. It took a long time to describe that scene ten years ago when Pierre followed the drum to glory, so long that Grandmamma was nodding before Mary had finished. But when Mary added that curiously enough she had met him again the other day, met him once or twice in fact, and that he had asked her if he could call this afternoon, Grandmamma sat upright and looked more wide-awake than Mary had ever seen her yet.

"Is the young man going to call on you or me?"

"On you, Grandmamma."

"Oh," the old lady grimly commented. "Then I'd better go and take my rest at once."

Mary could not make up her mind whether she should stay in the drawing-room until Pierre came or whether it would be wiser to let him interview her grandmother first. In the end she decided upon the latter course, and in great agitation of spirit she went upstairs to her own room where she tried to distract her thoughts by trying on several new dresses with which Lady Flower had insisted on replenishing her wardrobe, so that she should not carry an end-of-the-season air about her, the old lady had said. But the new dresses were incapable of keeping her from running out on the landing every few minutes to hear if the front door was being opened. It became impossible to remain in her room, and she went back to the drawing-room so

that she might see Pierre first and warn him that her grandmother was likely to be difficult.

At last Pierre arrived, looking trim and slim in a frock-coat. Mary was glad that he had dressed ceremoniously, for she knew how much importance Grandmamma attached to ceremony.

"Oh, Pierre," she exclaimed. "I only wanted to see you for a moment just to advise you to talk in French to Lady Flower. She is half French herself, you know, and I'm sure it will all sound much better in your own language. It's not that you don't speak English perfectly, but you might make a slip in a foreign tongue. You might give quite a wrong impression."

Pierre agreed with her about the wisdom of this, and then he took her in his arms.

"Ma bien aimée," he whispered. "Will you give me courage with one kiss?"

She fluttered upon his arms more lightly than a bird, more lightly than a moth, more lightly than a crimson leaf that is blown whispering along a window-pane. Then hearing her grandmother's step she fled from the room through the domed conservatory past the staring eyes of the pelargoniums and the pug-faced, toothless calceolarias.

Twenty minutes later, Mary found Pierre gone and her grandmother reading *The Times* as if she were trying to assure herself that normal life would continue in spite of a presumptuous young French-

man, who without prospects asked for the hand of an heiress.

"Although, considering what he is," said Lady Flower, "the young man behaved very well. I was able to show him at once how ridiculous it was that he should aspire to marry you."

"But I love him," Mary interposed.

"I have no doubt that at this moment you do love him. It is my business, dear child, to protect you against impulse."

Lady Flower was once more sitting in her boudoir at Barton Hall with her son before her. She had made the mistake then of sneering at Mary's mother, and although in this case it was unlikely that Mary would take matters into her own hand, it would be imprudent to run the risk of her doing so. With experience of a similar situation she ought to be able this time to have her own way. The old lady looked at Mary with an unwonted warmth of affection: Mary was Edward's daughter. The fact seemed to strike her for the first time. Edward's daughter . . . Edward who was drowned twenty years ago. Poor Edward, so like his mother! And there was Mary holding her hands just as he had held them on that June afternoon, the day before he married and tore himself forever from the bosom of family life, as perhaps she herself might have held her hands fifty years ago if she had had to oppose the wishes of that stern old general who fought at Waterloo or of that dainty

mother who bred in exile had yet kept about her the remote grace and grandeur of the *ancien régime.*

"It is not that he is of humble birth," she began to explain. "A Frenchman can surmount that disadvantage more easily than an Englishman, at any rate in England. But he has no money, and so far as I can gather no immediate prospects of ever having any money. Even if I were disposed to give you such a dowry as would enable you to indulge yourself in the luxury of marriage with a poor man, I should not permit myself to do so. For I should be wrong. Few men have the moral strength to live decently upon their wives. I know you will think that this is only the opinion of a cynical old woman, and I should be sorry if at your age you thought differently. But at my age one is no longer shocked by the nakedness of truth; at my age we begin to return to the shamelessness of childhood. How your dear grandfather would have disliked that last remark of mine. He had such a profound belief in old age. Any religious feelings he had, all centered round his respect for the age of God. Your poor grandfather . . . dear me, I am going back into the past instead of grappling with the present."

Mary had been listening to her grandmother in astonishment. She had expected a fierce and bitter opposition, which she had promised herself to defy; but it seemed that the old lady was going to argue with her, and that would be disconcerting. Grand-

mother's arguments were always so difficult to answer.

"I think perhaps I won't talk about this business any more to-day," Grandmamma was saying. "I have to make up my mind whether or not I will tell you something. Meanwhile, may I ask you not to see the young man until I have decided what to do?"

Mary promised this, and wrote to Pierre giving him a tryst by the Serpentine three days hence. Adèle was sent to beg Daisy Harland to come at once to talk over some important news Mary had to tell her. Mary would have gone herself, but she could see that her grandmother would not be able to avoid being suspicious of her meeting Pierre, and she did not want to do anything that would prejudice the old lady still more against him.

Daisy was much more discouraging than Grandmamma; she thought it was madness to think of marrying a French clerk who was the son of a common gardener, and who had at the moment neither money nor employment.

"My dearest Mary, it's the most absurd idea I ever heard! Why, you yould have to live in squalor unless you lived with Lady Flower, which of course would be impossible. You're too old for this kind of foolishness now. I saw no reason for your getting married in such a hurry. But I begin to understand now why your grandmother is so anxious to tie you up. She evidently knows you better than I do. Of course, he's a good-looking and—if that

attracts you—a romantic young man. But there are dozens of them in England. As for being in love, you know as well as I do that love runs its course like measles or scarlet fever. You can recover from love, but you can't recover from marriage, which in this case would be like a serious accident. You'd be lame for the rest of your life."

Lady Flower remarked how much surprised she had been to find that Mary's friend had grown so sensible.

"It must be hunting, I suppose."

"You only find her sensible because she dislikes the idea of my marrying Pierre."

"She sees the position from the standpoint of an outsider. Listen, Mary, I have never said anything about your father to you. I don't even know how much you have guessed."

Mary blushed hotly. The moment that she had dreaded for years was upon her. That dreadful secret, the consciousness of which had always clouded her intimate thoughts, was about to be revealed. She must steel herself to hear the proclamation of her illegitimacy. The definition in the dictionary flamed across her memory . . . *not authorized by law . . . improper . . . not born in lawful wedlock . . . bastard. Bâtard!* How often had she shivered over that in the French dictionary. How sedulously had she tried to ascertain what it really meant, in the way that no dictionary dares to reveal. And then those sickening

hints from horrid girls . . . the girls who came from South America were always the horridest . . .

No wonder Grandmamma looked serious and uncomfortable. If only a small portion of what was hinted were true, she must scarcely know how she was to look her granddaughter in the face and tell her not merely about herself, but about life and those mysterious beginnings of life that seemed to involve men and women in such horrors.

"I have guessed a good deal," Mary admitted bravely.

"Naturally, you must have done so. And I dare say those people with whom you lived. What was their name? Fox? Fawkes?"

"The Fawcuses," said Mary. From the past the vision of Mrs. Fawcus came back to her like the page of a fairy tale. In all stories about illegitimate children, there was a woman like Mrs. Fawcus who looked after them, kept them hidden, and guarded their secret. Why had she not made another effort to read *Jane Eyre* since it was taken away from her by Mademoiselle Lucinge only the week before she left school? In that book she might have pierced the dreadful mystery.

"You may have guessed," Grandmamma was saying, "that your father married beneath him, married a very beautiful girl, the daughter of one of our own tenant farmers."

"Then I'm not illegitimate!" Mary could not help exclaiming.

"Good gracious me!" said Lady Flower crossly. "What minds modern young women have. Is no kind of decent veil to be left over the unpleasant side of life? Why, at your age I did not know the meaning of illegitimate."

Mary would have liked to retort that she only knew the endless circle of a dictionary's definitions, that she did not really know its meaning. However, let her mother have been never so humble, she was married to her father.

"But you cannot have guessed all the misery that your father's marriage brought in its train. It killed him: it killed your mother: it killed your mother's father: it might have killed you. Your father was dependent upon his father. He defied him, and what was the result?"

Lady Flower left out nothing in the tale of the romantic marriage that could bring home to her granddaughter what it meant to run in the face of class tradition.

"The situation is almost the same now as when I entreated your father twenty years ago to think what he was doing. But in this case it is worse, because in this case it is the man who is of lower station. Mary, I implore you to give up this good-looking but hopelessly ineligible young Frenchman."

Lady Flower burst into tears, and Mary, who would have been less amazed to behold tears run down the cheeks of a marble statue, promised to give up Pierre.

This was the letter she wrote:

23 King's Gate, W.,
May 22, 1880.

I am afraid that I am not the wonderful being you have so often told me that I was. I cannot meet you to-morrow on the banks of the Serpentine, however fine the day is. I do not regret for an instant that I let myself fall in love with you. No, not for an instant, Pierre. I don't know why I say "let myself fall in love," because I could not help it. It was nothing to do with me. But I have promised my grandmother never to see you again and to give you up. I couldn't explain why, even if I were to see you. It has nothing to do with you, but only with me. If I married you I should have to elope, and though I should be happy when I was with you, I should be feeling all the while that my grandmother's old age was being made unhappy. You must not blame her. She is convinced that we are not meant for each other. My father and mother were drowned many years ago, because they eloped; she has lost her husband and her eldest son also: she is entirely alone in the world, and she was kind to me when I was a little girl. Forget me, Pierre, and try to forgive me. Do not think that I do not love you. Don't think that, Pierre. I believe that I have loved you ever since I first saw you at Châteaublanc. Why do I go on writing? I don't know; but somehow I can't bear to finish this letter which

is the last I shall ever write to you. Don't think of me too unkindly. If you ever do think of me, think of me that morning by the Serpentine when you first kissed my hand. Pierre, I can feel that kiss still. I shall feel it till I'm an old woman. I've nothing more to say, and yet I can't stop . . .

Mary put down her pen for a minute, and stared in front of her. Tick-tick! Tick-tick! Tick-tick! Tick-tick! The ormulu clock swung Pierre out of her life. She leaned over quickly and wrote:

Good-by, good-by,
Mary.

Adèle came into the room.

"Mr. Alison is downstairs in the drawing-room with *Miladi,* Mademoiselle."

"I'll come down at once, Adèle. Please take this letter to the post."

Mac rose from his place on the hearthrug and waddled after his mistress.

Chapter Four

THE WIFE

Chapter Four: The Wife

ON a wet November afternoon a brougham drawn by a pair of gray horses and coming from the direction of Kensington drove along the Knightsbridge road and pulled up outside Lady Flower's house in King's Gate. From it alighted a young woman who by some indefinable effect of maturity, some sedate expression of achievement, revealed that she was married. The age at which women decide to be matrons varies like feminine fashions, and in the year 1890 English women still clung, if less tightly every year, to the fashion of a middle age as long as Queen Victoria's reign.

Mary Alison at thirty should have been in the zenith of her beauty. That auburn hair had deepened in ten years like a gathered chestnut, but like a chestnut it had preserved the gloss of youth. Experience had given her blue eyes those profundities of color which inaccurate and ambitious observers have miscalled violet. Her complexion held the exquisite translucent hues of a September rose. And yet so much of her young grace was destroyed by the dress, which made any woman of the period appear like Noah's wife in a toy Ark, that she seemed less lovely now than ten years ago when she had stood by the drawing-room window of this

house, up the steps of which she was now walking with such slow and stately ease of movement. With her long forefinger pressing the bell, she turned and said to the coachman:

"Burton, you had better leave Mac at home when you come back for me at six."

At the sound of his mistress' voice, the grizzled head of the Dandie Dinmont gazed anxiously through the closed windows of the brougham. She raised a warning finger to bid him be good, and a moment later was lost to sight in the darkling hall.

"How is her ladyship, Adèle?"

"*Miladi* grows very weak, madame," the maid replied, leading the way upstairs. Across Mary's mind floated the picture of herself as a little girl in Paris following Adèle upstairs to bed. Even so had she led the way in those days and from time to time had turned round with flashing, frightening eyes to see if her charge was close behind her. How shadowy those days in Paris now, shadowy like this flight of London stairs, on which Adèle alone stood out clear, with her sallow face and eyebrows like the hair of a Japanese doll. Shadows . . . Shadows . . .

"Mrs. Alison is here, *Miladi.*"

Adèle stood aside to let Mary enter the room, where under a canopy of purple velvet, looking hardly more substantial than a lace handkerchief left upon the pillow, Lady Flower sat huddled in her last bed. One hand fluttered down upon the quilt

like a faded white petal to greet her granddaughter, who took it gently in her own that was still fresh and taper as a rosebud.

"I shall die very soon now, Mary," whispered the old lady. "At any moment. At any moment. Perhaps to-night. Perhaps this afternoon. Did you tell Burton to wait?"

"No. I sent him back to Campden Hill. I wanted to stay with you till you went to sleep."

"To sleep," her grandmother echoed. "I feel disinclined to sleep. I have such a long sleep before me."

Mary could not bring herself to make the conventionally optimistic reply. It did not seem worth while to pretend with phrases in the presence of this old woman already seemingly discarnate for that obscure event of death.

"A long sleep," the old lady went on in her tenuous voice. "A very long sleep. And yet I wonder. Ah, well, it was all said by Shakespeare, was it not? Though frankly I never cared greatly for Shakespeare. It is all too excitable. And yet I wonder."

"What are you wondering, Grandmamma?"

"If this really is the end. There might be something else, you know. Give me my vinaigrette."

The old lady sniffed it as if she would ward off the odors of eternity, just as twenty years ago she had used it against the odors of a much shorter journey to Lyons. She had been only too anxious to sleep then. But now. . . . How bright her eyes

were, like precious stones, like pools of water holding out against the encroaching frost of death.

"I do not really want to die," she said. "It seems such a little while since I began to feel younger again. Of late lying here I have remembered so much that I had forgotten. Odd little incidents of childhood have come back to me so sharply, so very vividly and clearly. Earlier this afternoon, before you came, I saw my father in that corner in his Hessian boots and cocked hat; and he said to me, 'Where's your Mamma?' It was so vivid that I made a movement to get out of bed and run to look for her. And then he asked me to fill his snuff-box with maccaboy. I have often wondered why a man so particular about his personal appearance should be a slave to snuff. But he was. Do you know what maccaboy is?"

Mary shook her head.

"It is a snuff scented with attar of roses, of which he was passionately fond. He acquired the habit when he was fighting in the West Indies. Long ago. Long ago. And of course this vision of him was nothing but an hallucination caused by weakness. Nothing but that. There cannot be anything before us when we lie like this. And yet I wonder. I cannot feel perfectly sure."

Mary did not know what to say. Here was really an opportunity for a clergyman to be useful; but she was afraid of suggesting such a visitor. Yet her grandmother might be hoping that somebody would

suggest a clergyman; for, although she would be too proud to ask for one herself, she might want one to be pressed upon her just as she had wanted the doctor pressed upon her.

Mary decided to risk the proposal.

"A clergyman?" echoed the old lady, clutching at her vinaigrette. "A clergyman?" she repeated. "Thank you, my dear, but I should find a clergyman in my bedroom as uncomfortable as I should find a large black retriever dog, and about as useful. I'm afraid that my wandering conversation has given you the impression that my mind is wandering. I thought I had made it perfectly plain that I considered the vision of my father an hallucination."

Mary begged her grandmother's pardon, and after a short silence the old lady inquired graciously after the children.

"What a pity," she said, "that Richard will not become Sir Richard when I die. I am sorry now that I allowed Barton to be sold. I think, had I known how much of a Flower I was going to have for a great-grandson, I should not have done so. However, regrets are useless. You are happy, are you not?"

"Why, yes, Grandmamma. What makes you ask that?"

The old lady's voice was sounding more remote every minute that she went on talking, and the furtive November dusk which had long been hiding in corners of the room now crept boldly forth and

climbed the velvet curtains of the canopy above the bed. Mary wanted to light the gas, but her grandmother waved her hand to signify that she preferred the gloom.

"I have wondered sometimes lately if you ever think of that young Frenchman whom I dissuaded you from marrying."

"Why, no, Grandmamma," said Mary. "Or if I do, only as one might think of anybody in the past."

"You are happy, really happy? Your marriage has brought you happiness?"

"Yes, yes, indeed, Grandmamma. Could anybody be unhappy with Richard and Geoffrey and Muriel?"

"You are happy because of the children?" Lady Flower persisted. "Your husband does not count?"

"But you know how fond I am of Jemmie."

"Fond, fond," the old lady murmured. "Looking back, I wonder if that means anything. Mary, you must be prepared for your children to bring you unhappiness. I do not say that they will. I hope that they will not. But you must be ready for that trial." She suddenly sat forward in the bed. "Hark! Do you hear a sound?"

"No, I hear nothing, Grandmamma."

"I hear a sound like the sea. Plainly! Yes, yes, quite plainly, the noise of the sea. Edward, forgive me if I was wrong," she cried. "I have tried to watch over your little girl. Pray do not light the gas, Mary. Give me your hand instead. Put me back among my pillows. And do not light the gas.

I cannot bear the idea of your seeing me die. And this is death. I know . . ."

Mary laid her grandmother gently back on the pillows, felt a swift trembling through the frail body, and speaking to her received no answer.

It was the first time in her life that Mary had come into the presence of death, and she sat for some time near that silence on the bed, wondering at her own calm. Were people always as calm as this when they beheld death? But even as she was congratulating herself she was seized with a panic and ran madly from the room out on the landing, the rosy gaslight of which in response to her cries was soon populated by maids in their black dresses and white caps.

Mary supposed that the correct thing would be to send a message for her husband to come immediately to King's Gate and take charge of the house, the servants, and herself. In fact, when Adèle with tear-swollen eyes came to tell her that the carriage was at the door, she asked if Madame would not like the coachman to drive back to Madame's house and fetch Monsieur. By Adèle's manner Mary realized that since her grandmother's death she was being accorded a respect almost as great as that which had formerly been accorded to the dead woman.

But what could Jemmie do? He would be extremely bored by being dragged out before dinner. He would not know what he ought to do, and irri-

tated by not knowing he would certainly do the wrong thing. Moreover, she did not feel that she wanted Jemmie. She was anxious to be quiet and avoid any discussion of her inheritance, any speculation upon its exact amount, any plans of Jemmie to build this house or buy that property. In fact, she should like to stay at King's Gate to-night by herself and sleep in her old room upstairs. She desired to make amends to her grandmother's memory for that unwonted display of terror in which she had indulged herself. She sent a note by Burton to say that she should not be back at Woodworth Lodge until the next morning.

Mr. Alison was displeased by his wife's message. If it would not have involved him in what might have been the unpleasantness of a houseful of hysterical servants, he would have driven back to King's Gate to protest against her action. It would have been sufficiently annoying to receive word that she might be late for dinner, or even that she might not be back at all for dinner; but to stay the night for no purpose except to gratify a whim of piety, that did strike Mr. Alison as unreasonable. He hoped that Mary was not going to turn religious, to start getting up early in the morning for Communion and all that kind of thing. One never knew what a woman might do after thirty. Or take up with spiritualism. He would soon put a stop to that. Table-turning and tambourine playing . . . long-

haired mediums and goggle-eyed women with skinny necks and Oriental beads . . . she had the children, and they ought to be enough.

"Did Burton say why your mistress had to stay?" he asked the parlormaid.

"No, sir; he said no more than give me Meddem's note."

Mr. Alison strode across the room in irritation, and nearly tripped over Mac, who squealed in alarm.

"Confound the dog! Take him downstairs, Pinkney," he called to the retreating maid. "He's getting much too old to be allowed all over the house. And what is the matter with the gas to-night?"

"It do seem to burn a bit dim, sir. I think Mac has gone and hid under your chair, sir."

"Come out of that, you brute," Mr. Alison shouted angrily.

There was a low growl in response.

"Did you hear him, Pinkney?"

The maid was stricken by awe.

"He deliberately growled at me."

Mr. Alison rocked the chair violently in order to frighten Mac into the open; when at last he had succeeded in driving him out of the room and was alone, he made up his mind to tell Mary on her return that her dog must be put away. It was not safe to have a dog like that about with children in the house. In any case it was too old. It was over a year old when he gave it to Mary nearly eleven years ago. Dogs ought not to be allowed to grow old. Mr. Alison

smoothed his ruffled brow and patted his bald head.

"That new hair-restorer is as much of a fraud as the rest of them," he thought. "One of these days somebody will prosecute a hair-restorer for obtaining money under false pretences. Personally I don't believe that, when a man has lost his hair so completely as I have, anything in the world will bring it back. That's where I take exception to their advertisements. They're dishonest."

Pondering the inclination of humanity to grow more dishonest daily, Mr. Alison looked at his watch and saw that there was still half an hour to dinner-time.

"She might easily have come back," he complained to himself.

He had looked forward to telling her about that extremely satisfactory bit of business with Moss, Doddington & Co. What was the use of slaving all day in the City to keep a wife and family and carriage and a large house? Women were apparently incapable of grasping what a serious strain it put on a man to work for hours under a load of domestic responsibility. If Mary really appreciated what he was doing for her, she would have let nothing interfere with her being at home to-night. He was very sorry of course about her grandmother's death. But after all the old lady was getting on for eighty-one. At such an age her death was to be expected at any moment. By the way, he must go to his tailor to-morrow on the way down to Throg-

morton Street. Nothing looked worse than resuscitated mourning.

"I wonder how much money the old lady will leave after all. A decent amount, I fancy. Odd that she never asked me to look after her affairs. She knew I was a good man of business. Business! It was a pity that Mary did not have to go to the City and work for a while. She would know herself then how dreary it was to come home and find the house deserted.

"Ah, nurse, are the children ready for their romp?" he asked as the door opened.

"Miss Muriel and Master Geoffrey said you promised to play tigers with them to-night, sir. I'm sure I don't know where they get hold of their wild ideas. And Master Richard went on at me till I said I would ask you if he might come down to dessert and have an extra quarter of an hour when he's done his homework."

"Not to-night, nurse. Not to-night. I'm dining out. In fact, I must go and dress at once. Tell the children I'll play with them to-morrow, and tell cook, will you, please, that there will be no dinner to-night. Mrs. Alison is staying at King's Gate. Her ladyship is dead."

"Oh dear, sir, I am sorry to hear that. My mistress will be very upset. Though I suppose with such an old lady and all it was to be expected."

"Yes, yes, quite so," said Mr. Alison. "By the way, I shouldn't tell the children to-night."

"No, sir, it might make them a bit creepy as they say."

"But I don't think I ought to play with them. I'm sure Mrs. Alison would rather they went to bed very quietly to-night. You'd better say that we've both had to go out to dinner. Oh, and, nurse, it would be as well not to let Mac go into the nursery or schoolroom. He seems to be turning savage. Poor old dog, he was my first present to your mistress before we were married."

"So I've heard my mistress say, sir. Poor old dog! Dear me, it's always one thing on top of another, as they say. And I'm sure I've passed the remark a score of times that it never rains but what it pours."

"Good night, nurse."

"Good night, sir. I'll see that the children keep very quiet. I was going to give Miss Muriel and Master Geoffrey both a dose of medicine to-morrow night, and they may jee-ust as well have it to-night."

Mr. Alison dressed in a state of astonishment at himself. "I can't think what made me so suddenly decide to dine out," he exclaimed aloud. "Talking to myself now," he continued. "I'm thoroughly upset. That's what I am. It's a good thing I *am* going out."

A few minutes later he was walking briskly down Campden Hill, conscious of the perfume of autumnal trees, vaguely excited by the sound of the distant

traffic in Kensington High Street that with every step became more distinct. It was a mistake to coop oneself up too much. He was falling into the habit of thinking that the day was over when he sat back in the railway carriage and opened the *St. James's Gazette*. He ought to be careful. What was that he was reading the other day about keeping young by refusing to be old? How true! It was the fault of marriage. Yes, marriage was responsible. Bachelors did not grow old. Responsibility, that was what did it. How free, for instance, he felt to-night just because Mary had sent word that she was not coming home. The message had annoyed him just at first; but now he was on the whole rather glad. The street lamps were twinkling; there must be a touch of frost in the air. So much the better. Far more healthy than the muggy weather they had been having. By Jove, the crispness made one feel ten years younger. Where should he go to-night? Dinner at the Savoy? Rather late perhaps for that. Why not a few oysters with half a pint of champagne, and then a theater followed by supper? A theater? Perhaps it was hardly the thing to go to a theater to-night. No, he would dine at the Savoy.

"Hansom! Savoy!"

"Right you are, sir."

"And you can drive fairly fast. I'm in a hurry."

It was a comfortable hansom behind a good horse; and Jemmie Alison, once again the authentic Jemmie, leaning forward over the apron gazed out

at the glittering life he had too long forsaken.

Mary lay awake most of the night in the strangeness of her old room. She tried to concentrate her mind piously upon her dead grandmother, but all her thoughts came back to herself. She now asked herself the question to which, when her grandmother asked it, she had returned so confident an affirmative. Would she not, if she were really happy with Jemmie, resent being away from him even for a single night? And was she not actually taking pleasure in being away from him? There was about the air of this old room of hers something delightfully fresh and invigorating. She felt much more herself. All these years of marriage she had been letting her personality be slowly submerged in her husband, in the cares of a household, and in her children. She must not forget *them,* the darlings! Should she have loved them more if their father had been somebody else? If Pierre had been their father, for instance? But then they would not be Richard, Geoffrey, and Muriel. And how could she love any other children better than those three tousle-heads? Besides, what nonsense it was to be speculating like this. She had not thought of Pierre for years, except casually to wonder sometimes where he was and if he ever thought of her. She could not deceive herself into imagining that she was still in love with Pierre, still less that she was pining for him. All the same, she wished that she had understood a little more about

life before she married Jemmie. Daisy Harland, who had been so full of good worldly advice, had not made much of a success with her own marriage. Daisy, who had been so confident that love was a passing malady, had thrown over everything for love, had let herself be dragged through the divorce court for a man who when it was all over had married another woman. Poor Daisy, was she happier now, somewhere on the Continent, always wondering if her friends would put up their parasols when they passed her on some sunny promenade?

And if she had not married Jemmie, she would never have had her beloved Richard. She thought of his coming back from one of his first days at school and of his news of being placed in an unusually high class for French and of his having to write out the verb *porter*.

"All the verb, darling?" she had asked.

"Well, that's what I couldn't ergzactly make out, Mum. Mr. Osbourne just said write out *porter: to carry,* and I think he only meant one of those lines of verbs like you see in the grammar book."

"It wouldn't do to make a mistake, dearest," she had said anxiously.

"No, it wouldn't, would it, Mummie? Perhaps I'd better write out everything, though it's pages and pages!"

And she had sat with him while he laboriously wrote the French and English of every tense and of every person in that tense. *That I might have been*

carrying. That thou mightest have been carrying . . . What a sleepy little boy she had tucked up that night! And next day he had come back to lunch with a woeful face to say that it was only the single line of principal tenses which had been set and that he had not liked to expose himself to the ridicule of his classmates by showing up his toilsome pages.

"But how did you explain you had nothing to show your master?"

"I said I'd left it at home, Mum, and he told me to bring it this afternoon. It won't take me hardly a minute to do."

No, no, it was unimaginable that she should not be the mother of Richard: and, pleasant though it was to be sleeping alone in her old room, Richard belonged to Jemmie as much as to herself.

Should she when at last she lay dying, for though the attempt to realize the inevitableness of death caught the breath and eluded the mind's grasp, the ultimate death of herself was a fact that must be believed, should she in that solemn hour ask a granddaughter—Richard's or dear fat Geoffrey's child—such questions as her own grandmother had asked her? Should she when an old woman look back at her life with doubt and forward to the grave with apprehension? And where now was the spirit of that cold body downstairs?

Pleasant to be lying like this by oneself. Pleasant . . . very pleasant . . . the sheets cool and pleasant . . . a delicious privacy. Yes, it was wrong

not to tell girls more about the actualities of existence. Would she tell Muriel one day? That dear dumpling! But, almost before she knew it, Muriel would be thinking about marriage. In another ten years, only as long as she had been married, Muriel would be fifteen. Ten years went by quickly enough, especially when three of them were spent in having babies. And she might have another baby. Jemmie did not seem to mind. "The more the merrier," he would say, as he had so often said before. How insensitive men were. And gross. Men? What did she know about men? Jemmie looked so much like other men that he was probably representative of the sex. Pierre had been different. But would he have been different if she had married him? When she kissed him that afternoon, when she gave him that one swift kiss, she had not known to what such a kiss might not be the prelude. Would not the knowledge have destroyed all its fairy quality? Was it possible to experience romance unless one was innocent? Oh, that sweet illusion of first love! Even Grandmamma once upon a time must have known that. While she was lying there in that dusky room, did she feel faintly upon her withered lips some blushful kiss of sixty years ago? Did she, ah, did she, and was it for that she doubted her wisdom in persuading her granddaughter to marry Jemmie Alison? Anyway, the marriage was accomplished. There was no use now to repent. Yet people who had enjoyed grand passions did exist.

"Love, my dear, was invented by the poets to excuse their own weaknesses."

Something like that Grandmamma had once observed. Were she alive now and should she make the same remark now, Mary would reply that marriage without love was invented by . . . but she was unable to think of a suitable mordant retort before she fell asleep in her own room.

It seemed as if the death of Lady Flower had acted upon husband and wife like an Horatian maxim that would remind humanity of time's swift flight. In the case of Alison the money they inherited made him feel more keenly how much of his life was being wasted in the pursuit of wealth. There was now no need for him to devote so much of his attention to business, and by taking a partner younger than himself he was able to spend less time in the office. Having once dined out away from home, he began to make a habit of dining out; and Mary in her turn began to wonder what she should do with her life. Occasional dinner-parties and occasional visits to the opera or the theater did not seem enough to fill existence at thirty. There were the children of course, as Jemmie was always reminding her when she seemed inclined to ask unanswerable questions about the end and meaning of human existence. But children, when there were nurses and nurse-maids and governesses and schoolmasters all easily obtainable, did not occupy a

woman's life fully. Besides, well-brought-up children went to bed early, and was there nothing better to do with life than sit at home reading novels that were only the least bit less dull than life itself? Jemmie often looked at his reflection in the glass and exclaimed upon the approach of age. But Jemmie was forty-five with a man's life behind him, even if he had been cooped up, as sometimes now in moments of irritation he implied that he had been cooped up by marriage. If Jemmie was concerned about the vanishing years, it was because he looked back with regret to the joys and freedom of his youth. But she, on what could she look back? One kiss briefer than a shooting-star, swifter than a swallow's flight, yet in remembrance, ah, how sweet!

So passed the winter of that year; and, when in February the white and purple crocuses pied the lawns of Woodworth Lodge, husband and wife both resolved that the year should pay them with what it brought forth.

"One must do something," Mary agreed with Mrs. Wryford, who considered herself Mary's most intimate friend, because she always stayed longer than any of the other visitors that haunted Mary's Friday afternoons.

"Of course! It's our duty. Now why don't you have a club like me? My dear, until I started my club for waitresses I was at a loose end. And it's so interesting. Why, I've been brought into close contact with people I should never have seen other-

wise except across a crumby table. I assure you, it's been quite a revelation to me. You'd be surprised to find how different my girls are, one from another. Oh yes, indeed, quite distinguishable, I assure you; and I think I can really claim to know each one individually. And many of them have leaned to confide in me quite a lot."

"Now that must be fascinating," said Mary.

"Yet it's hardly surprising when you think of their homes. Of course I never go to their homes. Oh no, I make a point of never doing that. I say to myself, 'Two nights a week, Ella, you are pledged to your girls.' And I can assure you, Mary, that I never fail to be with them unless I have a dinner-party or some social engagement. Do, my dear, take my advice and start a club. You speak French well, don't you? Why not found a club for French seamstresses in Soho? And now I simply must run. Good-by, you dear attractive creature," Mrs. Wryford exclaimed, kissing Mary warmly on each cheek. In the door she stopped a moment. "I always say and I always shall say that I enjoy the few minutes we have together every Friday more than anything in the week. Good-by, you dear thing. It's still quite light. I always think it's a sign of spring when the days really begin to draw out. Good-by! Good-by!"

How Grandmamma used to dislike women of the type of Mrs. Wryford, Mary thought.

"And I expect in another thirty years I shall dislike them just as much as she did."

At dinner that night Mary broached the subject of a club for girls to her husband.

"French seamstresses!" he exclaimed. "What on earth next will you be wanting to do? Aren't the children enough of a responsibility?"

"They're no responsibility at all," Mary argued. "You won't allow them to be. Don't you remember what a fuss you made when you discovered I was taking out Geoffrey and Muriel every afternoon?"

"I didn't make a fuss. I never do make a fuss. I don't suppose that a less fussy man than myself exists. I merely observed that for you to wear yourself out looking after children while a mob of nurses and nursemaids were eating off their heads doing nothing at home was ridiculous. Surely there's a happy medium between dragging a perambulator round Kensington Gardens and founding clubs for French seamstresses?"

Mary sat silent for a while pondering her tactics, while Jemmie, with what she felt was unnecessary gusto, ate a large slice of turbot.

"I don't think there's any need to sulk . . ." he began: but at the moment one of the parlormaids came within range of the conversation, and, as Mary thought cynically, her husband had not yet reached such a pitch of married boredom as would let him be rude to her in front of the servants.

When they were left alone with the dessert, Mary returned to the attack.

"You see, lately, Jemmie, you've left me so much alone in the evening that I suppose it's natural for me to sit here and make plans for myself."

The husband glanced up sharply: never until now had his wife thrown out a hint that she had noticed his increasingly frequent withdrawals from the fireside. Could she be jealous? Had any rumor of that phaeton he bought last week reached Mary? Gossip sprung up no one knew how. It might be that one of her friends, one of those confounded women that seemed to spend their lives visiting other women, had warned her to keep an eye on her husband. It would be awkward if Mary seriously intended to press him on the subject of dining out, and, more than dining out, of staying away from home for a couple of nights often enough. Mary herself would never suspect him of infidelity. Infidelity? Bosh! There was nothing serious to it. Maudie did not expect him to face a scandal on her account. He should be middle-aged almost immediately. This was his last love-affair; and dash it, the little girl was fond of him. Who could say why? Women were strange creatures. But it certainly was not for his money. Poor little Maudie! The walnut he was cracking suddenly burst in fragments upon his plate. He looked up guiltily.

"What were you saying, dear? I beg your pardon for not answering. I couldn't crack this nut."

"I said that it was natural for me to make plans for myself," Mary answered. She perceived that Jemmie was embarrassed and went on more boldly. "I don't in the least expect you to stay at home because I am in the house. But surely you can have no objection to my occupying myself somehow, and this club would be the very thing."

"I daresay you're right," said the husband. After all, it was politic to give his wife some latitude. "Yes, I daresay you're right. I was a little taken aback for the moment, and I didn't want you to overtire yourself slaving for people who have no gratitude. You know, the more you do for people, the less they give you in return. Did I tell you about Jackson, our head clerk? We raised his salary last month, and yesterday he calmly tells me that he has accepted another place at a larger salary. What do you think of that? That's gratitude! In my opinion the world's going downhill. Now my father's head clerk stayed with him till he died and never had a rise of salary all the time. Didn't want it. Content. But you don't get that type of man nowadays."

Husband and wife rose from their dessert. Husband and wife sat down in the drawing-room. Wife sang "Three Roses" with an obligato of kettle-drums from husband's manipulation of *The Times.*

Just when the red June Roses blow
She gave me one,—a year ago,
A Rose whose crimson breath revealed

The secret that its heart concealed,
And whose half-shy, half-tender grace
Blushed back upon the giver's face.
To hope was not to know.

Tinkle—tinkle—tinkle—tinkle—tinkle—tinkle!

"Poor little Maudie," thought an infatuated man of forty-five. "Poor little girl, she'll miss me to-night."

Just when the Red June Roses blow
I plucked her one a month ago.
Its half-blown crimson to eclipse,
I laid it on her smiling lips:
The balmy fragrance of the south
Drew sweetness from her sweeter mouth,
Swiftly do golden hours creep,
To hold is not to keep.

Tinkle—tinkle—tinkle—tinkle—tinkle—tinkle!

"I mustn't neglect Maudie," thought a sentimental man of forty-five. "Poor little lonely Maudie! It's a wonderful thing for a man to be loved as she loves me."

Tinkle—tinkle—tinkle—tinkle—tinkle—tinkle!

The red June Roses now are past,
This very day I broke the last—
And now its perfumed breath is hid,
With her, with her, beneath a coffin lid:
Ah—h—h—h—h—h,

There will its petals fall apart,
And wither on her icy heart:—
At three red Roses' Roses' cost
My world was gained, my world was gained
And lost!

Tinkle—tinkle—tinkle—tinkle—tinkle—tinkle-tink!

"That's a very pretty song, you know," said Jemmie. "I enjoyed that. I wish you'd sing oftener of an evening."

Mary looked round in perplexity.

"I haven't sung after dinner for five years," she reminded him coldly.

"As long as that? Surely not as long ago as that?"

"Five years ago, Jemmie, you asked me if it was necessary every evening to sit down immediately after dinner at the piano."

"I must have had a headache or something," he protested.

"Yet you never noticed that I no longer sang."

"I suppose I took it for granted that you didn't want to sing. But I thoroughly enjoyed it this evening. I don't know, I suppose I was in the mood for singing. Why don't you sing another?"

She lifted the seat of the music-stool, and after rummaging among a pile of tattered songs she found the one she wanted:

I had a message to send her,
To her whom my heart loved best.

When the last tinkle had died away, Jemmie, who had stopped crackling *The Times* because there was nothing more to read that interested him, asked his wife if he had not heard the song before somewhere. She smiled ironically.

"I expect I've heard you sing it," he hastened to add apologetically.

"No. Not me."

Good heavens, could it be that he had heard Maudie sing that song? Maudie did sometimes sing sentimental songs on wet afternoons. Nonsense! If Maudie had sung it, Mary could not know that. Gossip could effect a good deal, but gossip could not discuss Maudie's choice of music.

"Well, I don't know where I heard it," he declared.

"And I certainly shall never reveal where or when it was," she murmured.

While that night Mary was brushing her chestnut hair before the big oval mirror of her dressing-table her husband came and, bending over, kissed the tip of her ear.

"Please! please!" she exclaimed, drawing away. "I did not sing to attract you, but to amuse myself."

"Well, really you know, dash it, Mary, you do say the most cutting things sometimes. What have I done to deserve that?"

"Now, Jemmie, don't pretend you mind whether I say cutting things or not. What do you care nowadays?"

Jemmie sighed to himself and, deliberately omitting his good night kiss, turned over and buried his head ostentatiously in the pillow.

"I'm not at all sure that she isn't jealous," he confided to himself, as he set out to keep an appointment with Maudie in dreamland.

Mary lay for some time watching with a weary regard that amorphous back, like a wayfarer who sees another hill before him and the end of the journey not yet in sight.

Mrs. Wryford's prophecy that Mary would derive much pleasure from getting to know individually the various girls in whom she avowed a general interest by the act of founding for them a club was fulfilled. Indeed it was more than fulfilled, for Mrs. Wryford certainly never expected that her friend would find romance for herself in the lives of French seamstresses, a vicarious romance it might be, but its effect was to mitigate for Mary much of the dreariness that she was beginning to think life ended in after one was thirty. Thirty! At this period the woman of thirty was not considered a romantic subject; indeed, if any woman of thirty had pretended to romance she would have been considered a reader of French novels, and as such faintly tinged with impropriety.

However, it was not enough for Mary's philanthropic zeal to sit listening to the tale of Henri and Jeanne, or of Armand and Virginie. She must educate her girls. She must provide them with an out-

look. She must widen their horizon. She must teach them that the world was not bounded by Oxford Street on the north and Shaftesbury Avenue on the south. With this purpose in view she took them on one Saturday afternoon to the Zoological Gardens, on another to the Egyptian Hall, and once again to hear Moore and Burgess Minstrels. Then Mrs. Wryford brought news of a series of lectures at which various distinguished travelers with the aid of a magic-lantern would personally conduct whosoever would fare with them to the uttermost parts of the earth.

"Last week we went to Greenland, Labrador, and Alaska. I can assure you, my dear Mary, the tints upon the ice were exquisite. I rarely enjoyed an evening more. Why don't you take your girls next week? Madagascar is the subject. I hear that the lecturer, who is a Frenchman, speaks English with quite remarkable fluency."

"What's his name?"

"Now, my dear Mary, do you expect me to to remember the name of a Frenchman?"

Thus it was that Pierre Menard, lean, tropically brown, his hair about the temples white and everywhere streaked with gray, his mustache and imperial still black, entered Mary's life again. Mary was glad that the auditorium was darkened when she saw him first, not so much because she feared that anybody would notice her agitation, but because she wanted to stare hard at Pierre without being op-

pressed by the consciousness of her surroundings. It seemed to her that he must be aware of her regard and that presently over a hundred heads he would glance back his recognition.

"Dis, Madeleine, n'est-ce pas qu'il est beau?" one of the girls whispered to her neighbor.

It was that nice and pretty creature Yvonne who had spoken. She had always been one of Mary's favorites.

Driving back to Campden Hill, while street-lamp after street-lamp tossed its bouquet of golden light into the brougham, Mary pondered the course of her behavior in the near future. It might be that Pierre would scornfully reject the proffer of renewed friendship. If he had remembered her at all, she might be now a bitter memory; if he had forgotten her so completely that a letter from her would bring a puzzled frown to his brow . . . Oh, it was difficult to decide what she ought to do. Mary did not consider the effect upon herself of bringing Pierre back into her life. It was of nothing except her effect upon him that she thought during that black and golden drive to Campden Hill.

At home she found Adèle, who was her maid these days, waiting up. Madame must prepare herself for a shock; Madame must have courage; Madame must not give way to grief at the news she must break to Madame.

"Nothing has happened to the children?" Mary exclaimed in terror.

"Ah, mais non, grâce à Dieu. Nothing to them. It is the poor little Mac who is dead. He was run over, Madame, and must be shot, Monsieur said."

"Where is Monsieur?"

"Monsieur has been called away on business and will not be here until Monday evening. Monsieur told me to tell Madame."

"And where is Mac?"

"He is buried in the garden. I will show Madame where is his grave in the morning."

"No, no, show me now."

Adèle looked for a moment as often in Mary's childhood she had been wont to look when her charge had expressed a desire to do something that Adèle considered unreasonable. However, nowadays it was she who must obey, and by the light of a foggy London moon she led the way across the lawn to where in the shadow of a grimy aucuba the mound was heaped above Mac's grave.

Mary gazed at it for a minute or two in silence, and without a word turned and walked back to the house.

"You can go to bed, Adèle. I shall not want you any more to-night."

While Mary brushed her hair before the oval mirror, the scenes of the life she had spent with Mac moved across her brain like the slides of a magic-lantern. She saw Jemmie arrive with him in a hansom-cab, saw him trying to coax him upstairs to the drawing-room at King's Gate.

"I've bought you a little dawg, Mary."

How hard she had tried to express her thanks by addressing him as Jemmie without letting him see what an effort it was, for she had known that nothing could please him more. Somehow she gulped out the Christian name. How happy he had been. And with what grateful affection he had patted Mac good-by.

The picture faded, and now there behind her stood Daisy Harland examining Mac critically in the manner of one who knew all that there was to be known about dogs.

"Not a bad little pup. Come here, boy, and say how-do to your Aunt Daisy."

But Mac simply would not go and say "how-do" to his Aunt Daisy, and from the first had attached himself exclusively to his mistress.

There he was now growling in Pierre's arms on the day of the dog-fight in Kensington Gardens.

Pierre?

Strange that to-night Mac should die, to-night when he who had entered her life with Mac's help should now stand once more upon its threshold. Pierre? Why should she not write to Pierre? No harm would come from that. If he refused to answer her letter, nobody would be any the wiser.

"Mac! Mac! Mac!"

Silence. No pitter-pat of dear bandy legs. He was lying out there in the cold garden.

"Mac, you clumsy old darling, you must not keep lying on my train."

How restless and unhappy he had been on that wedding morning! How he had hated it! And when he was left behind to stay at home in charge of Adèle during the honeymoon, what a howling he had set up! She had heard him above the noisy guests bidding her good-by on the steps of the house in King's Gate.

"Poor little dawg," Jemmie had exclaimed. "We really ought to have taken him with us. I owe a lot to that little dawg. I owe you to him," he had murmured with a sound in his voice that had frightened her rather. But she must let him kiss her now. She had no right to refuse. She was married. How glad Mac was to see her when she came back, and how he had enjoyed his first scamper in the garden of Woodworth Lodge. For him the lawn here must have seemed as large as the Park. Dear old dog, with what zest he used to chase the sparrows and how good he was with cats! He hated cats really; but he knew that his mistress loved them, and he would deny himself the most tempting pursuits to oblige her.

Jemmie had always liked the old dog until the night Richard was born, when Mac lying outside her bedroom door had growled at Jemmie, who had come up to see how she was. No, after that Jemmie had never liked him, had always talked about its being a mistake to have a dog in a house where

there were children. As if he would ever have hurt the children! It was only Jemmie he disliked. Yes, it was strange how much he disliked Jemmie. And now Jemmie had had him shot. Had it really been necessary . . . no, that was unfair. She ought not even in thought to accuse Jemmie of anything like that. How sad the children would be to-morrow! Their beloved Mac. That was the kind of irritating thing Jemmie did. Fancy his telling nurse that the dear little dog was not to be allowed in the nursery! And nurse had given herself airs of such importance, because Jemmie had told her this himself. Ridiculous woman!

"Mac! Mac!"

Could it really be true that she should never again see that grizzled head and those faithful eyes?

If Pierre did come to see her, would he ask after Mac, would he remember him?

Pierre?

Eleven years. Not quite eleven years since she saw him last. It was not a very long time really. So distinguished as he had looked! How had he come to find himself in Madagascar? He must have gone there after she had told him that everything was over.

Pierre?

It might seem less than eleven years to him. She tossed her hair back over her shoulders and rose from the dressing-table.

In the benign gaslight her bureau stood invitingly open.

"Yes, I will," she declared, and sitting down she wrote this note:

Woodworth Lodge,
Campden Hill, W.
May 3rd, 1891.

Dear Pierre,

I was at your lecture to-night. If you remember who I am after eleven years and feel inclined to renew an old acquaintance, won't you come and have tea with us on Wednesday next any time after four? I should so much enjoy to hear more about your adventure. *Yours sincerely,*
Mary Alison.

There was no answer by post, but on Wednesday afternoon when she was sitting in the drawing-room, counting over to herself the woolen spiders and butterflies crawling up and down her curtains, he came.

Once in the early days of marriage Mary had taken part with her husband in some amateur theatricals, in the course of which she had been attacked by stage fright and stood speechless on the stage for what seemed an age of agony before she regained her voice. It was the first time Jemmie was angry with her, and she had resolved never to act again. Now when Pierre was shown into the room she felt just as she felt then. Fortunately he was more at

ease than she was, and under his guidance of the conversation Mary slowly recovered her self-possession.

All the time that Pierre was talking Mary became more and more conscious of him as a man. She had never regarded Jemmie except as an institution. These eyes that looked so eagerly into hers and at the same time beyond hers to remote shores and distant mountain-peaks made her heart beat faster, her breath come and go. Yet, he was only talking to her as he had talked to an audience the other night. There was nothing personal, still less intimate, in his words.

"I was very lucky to arrive in Madagascar just before we went to war with Queen Ranavalona—a very remarkable woman. So was her niece who succeeded her. I was also lucky to know English so well, because you English were always there behind the scenes with your officers in the Malagasy army; besides, there were always negotiations with your consular officials. We shall have war again in Madagascar soon."

"Again?" Mary echoed in alarm.

Pierre made a gesture of contempt.

"It will not be a very dangerous war for us," he laughed.

At this moment Jemmie, to his wife's regret, came in unexpectedly early.

"This is Monsieur Menard," she said, introducing the stranger with an air of faint embarrassment as

if she were explaining the presence of some odd new decorative addition to the drawing-room of Woodworth Lodge. "Monsieur Menard visited us in King's Gate before we were married. He has been abroad for ten years."

"Charmed to make your acquaintance," said Pierre, bowing.

Jemmie shook hands with English awkwardness, evidently wondering how on earth he was expected to reply to the exaggerated courtesy of the stranger.

"I was wondering what night would suit Monsieur Menard to come and dine with us."

Jemmie glared at his wife in amazement; but without being openly rude he did not know how to dispose of the unwelcome invitation.

"What in creation put it in your head to ask that fellow to dinner?" he demanded when Pierre was gone. "You might have guessed that he would accept. He was probably afraid to refuse for fear of being rude."

"On the contrary, I think he was agreeably surprised to find that somebody in this house was polite enough to invite him," said Mary.

"That's meant for me, I suppose? If I were you, Mary, I should keep a check on my tongue. A sharp tongue doesn't add to a woman's charm. Where did you pick this fellow up?"

"I told you. He used to visit us at King's Gate before we were married."

"I don't see why we should have all your grand-

mother's foreign friends and acquaintances foisted on us for the rest of our lives," Jemmie grumbled. "And I wish you'd answer my question. Where did you meet him again?"

"At a lecture on Madagascar to which I took my girls."

Jemmie threw up his eyebrows to express compassion for human folly.

"You'll be bringing Barnum and Bailey back to dinner next," he prophesied. "Or one of the keepers at the Zoo. I don't want this house filled with showmen and cranks. I knew what it would be when you started that club of yours. I should have thought three children was enough for any woman. But go your own way. Don't let anything I say interfere with your pleasures. From what I can see of it the women will be ruling the men before long."

Mary let her husband grumble on for a while. Then she suggested a few names for a dinner-party.

"I don't want a dinner-party," he declared angrily. "I'm terribly overworked just now, and I like to rest whenever I can. You know how late I've been kept every day this week at the office. We get quite enough dinner-parties that we have to give and go to without letting ourselves in for any more than are necessary."

"Very well then," said Mary, "I'll ask nobody else."

"A jolly evening for me to look forward to," grumbled her husband. "Very jolly."

"You'll find Monsieur Menard most interesting, I assure you. His adventures in Madagascar . . ."

"Madagascar!" Jemmie interrupted angrily. "What do I care about Madagascar! I'm not a girl's club. You'll be suggesting in a minute that I should read *Robinson Crusoe* on my way to the office."

Mary began to laugh, upon which her husband retired in dudgeon to the billiard-room, where he succeeded in making a break of thirty-one by the indiscriminate use of both white balls and was comparatively pleasant when he emerged again.

On the evening that Pierre was invited to dinner at eight, Mary began to dress at half-past six; by a quarter-past seven Adèle was in despair, and the room was littered with discarded frocks. While the discussion was proceeding, with Adèle becoming more voluble every moment, a note arrived by messenger boy from Jemmie to say he was afraid that he should not be able to get home to-night, as he had to go down into the country upon very important business. He asked Mary to make his apologies to Mr. Menard.

"Unusually polite," she thought, and went back to a consideration of her dress for to-night. Since her husband's note that problem assumed an even greater importance. In the end she chose light blue as the color, and the sash of a darker shade tied in a

large bow over her left hip made her seem much younger. Adèle declared that she had not changed in ten years, and Mary blushed with pleasure at the obvious compliment.

"And I really do feel quite young to-night," she assured her maid.

During dinner Pierre talked away about Madagascar as if there were no other topic in the world. Mary, watching him in the rubied shadow above the candles, did not really pay much attention to what he was saying, but thought all the time how distinguished he looked and how like an Englishman in evening dress, notwithstanding the imperial. And Grandmamma had laid stress on his inferiority to herself. What a fool she had been to listen to her! In any gathering who would have stood out more clearly, Jemmie or Pierre? Why, Jemmie looked like a poulterer beside him. If only she had known enough about the world to argue with her grandmother then! How Pierre must have despised her! Did he despise her now, or was he simply not interested in her? Perhaps he was interested in nothing except Madagascar. He never seemed to look at her while he was talking, but always at an audience; he must have fallen into that habit from lecturing. Or perhaps he did not wish to embarrass her. Yes, probably that was the reason why he continued to talk about Madagascar without looking at her. She must remember that eleven years had gone by. Eleven years, during which he had had all these

adventures of which he was talking. Eleven years, during which she had married and had had three children. It was only the suddenness of meeting again after so long which made her forget the sundering years . . . the years . . . the irrevocable years . . . Odd that Jemmie should have decided not to come back to-night. Would he have come back if he had known that once, eleven years ago, this despised Frenchman had possessed her heart and that no one else had ever touched it since? Would he be jealous? Pierre was pledging her in a glass of port wine. She never drank red wine, but to-night she must take a sip in response. Would the maids think it odd if she drank Pierre's health? No, no, they would attribute it to foreign ways.

"*Salut,*" she murmured.

"*Trinquez,*" he laughed, raising his glass to meet hers. There was a faint tinkle, and for a brief moment their fingers touched.

"Let us go into the drawing-room for coffee," she said, "unless you would rather sit here and finish your wine."

He shook his head and followed her from the table.

"*Enfin,*" he said when the coffee had been brought in and they were sitting alone together in the drawing-room. "*Enfin,* here we are!"

"After eleven years, Pierre."

"After eleven years, Mary. Yet you have scarcely changed."

"Oh yes, I have changed a great deal, Pierre."

"Is the old lady still alive, Mary?"

"She died last autumn, Pierre."

"She was no friend to me, Mary."

Each of them used the other's Christian name in every sentence as if the uttermost advantage must be taken of an opportunity that neither of them had hoped to enjoy over again. Each of them seemed to feel the propriety, the necessity indeed, of giving way to sentiment on such an occasion.

"She believed that she was acting for the best."

"And was she?" he asked, looking at the woman of whom, once the illusion of her love was shattered and the first chagrin was allayed, he had scarcely thought in all those years.

"It's hardly fair to ask me that now, Pierre. You forget that I am married and the mother of three children."

"I am not married," he murmured, drawing his chair a little closer.

"You have been otherwise occupied."

"I had to occupy myself."

By now Pierre's chair had made a ruck in the carpet, at which he would have to put it like a horse at a fence if he wished to draw still closer to Mary; but rising boldly he seated himself in another chair at least three feet nearer.

"I had to occupy myself," he repeated. "When you wrote me that letter I was . . . but what right have I to speak of my feelings now? I must con-

sider myself lucky that I was able to forget them in my new career."

"Time works miracles," Mary sighed. "I've often wondered where you were and what you were doing."

"I have wondered about you. *Mon Dieu,* how I have wondered! And I used to think about Mac."

Mary's eyes filled with tears.

"Pierre! You remembered my little dog! He only died last week. He was run over, and my husband had to shoot him."

"Your husband," he repeated in gloomy tones. "I do not have to refer to my wife. I have never married."

"You did not remain single on my account," she said.

Pierre paused for a moment as if he were trying to resist the temptation to tell her that it was on her account. But the forms of Malagasy maidens floated within the smoke of his cigarette, and forbade him to claim too straight a fidelity.

"If I had ever found the right woman, I suppose I should have married. But the kind of life I was leading demanded the right kind of woman to share it. Ah, Mary, if only you could have shared it! If only . . ."

He leaned over, and taking her hand from the arm of her chair upon which it was resting he raised it slowly to his lips.

Mary was not so much astonished at herself as

she felt she ought to be, as perhaps she would have been if Jemmie had not shown so clearly his indifference to her during these last few months. Pierre could not have been holding her hand like this if Jemmie had come back to dinner.

"Ought you to be taking my hand like this?" she asked.

He paid no attention to the question, but went on talking.

"With the right kind of woman at one's side what might not a man achieve?" he demanded. "Here are you in London leading the life of thousands of other women, when with me you might have become as famous as the wife of Garibaldi."

"I don't think I should care to be famous, Pierre," she murmured with a shake of the head. "I'd like you to be famous. But I don't want fame."

"No, no, you want love," he cried. "And it is not too late even now."

"Oh yes, it is," she whispered with a sad smile. "Years too late, Pierre. Besides, I'm not the sort of woman who could bear the burden of an illicit love-affair. I should be afraid of it. I did wrong in thrusting myself into your life again. I had no courage then. I have no courage now."

When she spoke thus, he rose from his chair and kneeling beside her drew her lips down to meet his own.

"Are you sure you have no courage?" he asked breathlessly. "Mary, we are still young. We could

still be happy together. In my life there has been no other woman but you. Have you loved any one as you loved me, as you still love me at this moment while I hold you closer to my heart than I have ever held you? Come away with me, Mary. Come away with me to-night, now. Leave behind you all this."

While Pierre was talking, Mary felt that she was nothing more than a doll that a child was vainly trying to wake to life.

A child?

"Hush! Did you hear somebody calling?" she asked in sudden apprehension.

"Come to the open window. The air in this room is hot. Come and look at the May moon, *ma bien aimée.*

She let him draw her arm through his and lead her to the window, where they stood a while in the lilac-scented hush of what could scarcely be imagined a London night.

"The world is so much bigger than this room," he proclaimed.

"I need no lover to tell me that," she whispered.

How wonderful it would be to go right away . . . right away . . .

She allowed herself to be enfolded in his arms. Moonlight and the perfume of lilac and a tale of green islands murmured in her ear held her entranced. Bewitched by the imagination of love enduring forever, she looked up at him. Her hands were upon his shoulders in appeal, and then there

was a tap on the door. Mary sprang away from Pierre and stood quivering like a sapling released from the woodcutter's grasp.

"What is it, nurse?"

"If you please, ma'am, I shan't rest till you've had a look at Master Richard. After he came back from school he said he had a headache, but I didn't like to worry you without cause. Only now he says his throat is so bad, and really I don't like the looks of him at all."

Mary did not wait to make any apologies to Pierre, but hurried upstairs to where in his little room, of which he was so proud, her eldest son was tossing upon his bed and muttering rapid nonsense with fever's thick and troubled accents.

"Dearest boy, is your throat very bad? Let me look at your chest. Turn the gas higher, nurse. I want to see if there's any rash. Give me your hand, Richard. Lie still, my darling, a minute. Mother wants to feel your pulse. Nurse, ring for Pinkney and tell her to go at once for Dr. Marlow."

Nurse hurried away.

"Is your throat very bad, Richard darling?"

"Worse and worse," the little boy whispered.

"My loved one, mother's so dreadfully sorry. Never mind. The doctor will soon be here. Could you open your mouth and let mother look at it? All right, my sweetheart, don't agitate yourself. I won't fuss you, but when the doctor comes you must

try to let him see what's the matter. Darling boy, mother's so dreadfully sorry it hurts."

She sat by the bed keeping the yellow curls from his eyes and soothing him with her voice.

Presently nurse came back.

"Pinkney's gone just as she is, ma'am, without waiting to pop on anything. Let's hope Dr. Marlow is at home. And what about the gentleman in the drawing-room, do you wish for him to do anything?"

"Apologize to him, please, nurse, from me for leaving him so abruptly and explain about Master Richard. Say how sorry I am not to be able to say good night myself. How very sorry . . . What is it, Richard darling? It's mother beside you. Try to lie still, dearest. I know it hurts horribly. But try to lie still."

Chapter Five

THE MOTHER

Chapter Five: The Mother

IN the rich light of a September afternoon of the year 1900 Mary Alison slowly paced the grass walk along the phlox border at High Corner, wondering why everybody was so late for tea, even Jemmie, who nowadays was not often late for a meal. At that moment her husband appeared, looking as hot and red as the reddest phlox in the border.

"Tea ready?" he gasped. "By George, I'm baked!"

He slipped his overheated tweed-covered arm into hers so cool in its muslin; thus, affectionately, they strolled together in the direction of the big mulberry tree on the lawn, beneath whose shade, notwithstanding the way the ripe fruit at this season sometimes tumbled into the cups, they always sat for tea.

"You know, I'll tell you what it is," said Jemmie, cramming his mouth with bread and butter. "I'll tell you what it is, Mary. I took up golf too late. That's what I did. Too old. I shall never be any good at it. I'd give it up, if I didn't think it kept my weight down."

"But I think it's so clever of you to play at all," said his wife consolingly. "I was thinking I should have to take it up myself. Women are beginning to

play quite a lot everywhere. I'm sure I should never get on half so well as you did when you began."

"Ah, you're too sympathetic, my dear. Yes, that's what you are. You should hear Muriel sneering at her poor old father's efforts. As for Geoffrey, he declines to play with me. 'Pon my word, he does. Yes, he told me last week that people on the links stared so. I said, 'They stare at your ties, my boy.' Ha-ha! I rather had him there, I flatter myself. Ha-ha-ha! Yes, I said, 'It's your ties and stockings that make 'em stare, my boy, not your father's driving.' By the way, where are the two of them?"

"I was wondering," Mary said. "It's odd, isn't it, dear, that neither of them ever seems to bother at all about us? You'd think when Muriel was going back to school next week that she'd want to spend some of her time with her father and mother. She does give *you* a little of it; but I hardly see her between breakfast and dinner."

"Young, you know. She's young," the father apologized. "We must try to remember that. You'd think that Geoffrey would be glad to play a round with me; but if he can dodge it, he will. I saw a bit of him last week, because there was a fellow staying at the hotel who offered to give me some advice about the proper allowance to make him at Oxford when he goes up in October. I can't help feeling that two hundred and fifty pounds a year is enough. But this fellow says, 'No, you can't do on less than three hundred pounds at a college like St. Mary's.'

Well, I suppose I shall have to give it to him."

"Yes," Mary sighed, "children are strange. They seem quite suddenly not to belong to one, and to be almost complete strangers. Thank heaven, Richard at any rate has never learnt to do without me entirely."

"Ah, Richard!" her husband laughed. "But we were discussing ordinary boys and girls, common or garden boys and girls, not paragons. Though, by George, I've no right to tease you about him, for he is a fine lad. There's no doubt about that. Well, he'll be here to-morrow. Yet not for long, I'm afraid. You mark my words, he'll be gazetted almost at once. They've a good many losses to make up in South Africa."

"Jemmie, don't! It's too horrible to think of."

"Duty, my dear," said the father sternly. "You must be glad in your heart that Richard is going to do his duty. We shall be proud of him if he gets out there."

"I should be just as proud of him at home," said the mother.

Further discussion of Richard was interrupted by the arrival of Geoffrey and Muriel, who immediately sat down to tea and exclaimed at the coldness of the scones.

"Did you expect us to wait any longer?" their mother asked. "It's half-past five, dear children."

"Sorry," muttered Geoffrey, who was a plump youth, but good-looking in a fair florid style. He

greatly resembled his father at the same age; and though to hear Jemmie talk about his youth now was to conjure up a half-heroic figure of mythical prowess and virtue, it is probable that the son equally resembled in character his father at the same age. Muriel, who was fifteen, did not resemble either of her parents much, although in figure, if the figure of a girl of fifteen may be granted the name, she seemed likely to take after her father. She was very fair, round-faced and blue-eyed, reputed clever, an admirable athlete, and immensely popular at school. Her mother never felt really at ease with Muriel, though she never could satisfactorily explain to herself why this should be so; it seemed absurd to allow herself to bow embarrassed before that pitiless judgment of youth; but bow she did, and the consciousness of her position often made her irritable. Not that any display of irritation affected Muriel, who would merely stare at her mother, slightly knitting the fair brows above those eyes of porcelain blue.

"I'm beginning to be afraid that Muriel may be difficult," Mary confided in her husband that evening, when she came to bid him good night.

"Oh no, I don't think so. Several of my family have been very clever, but it never led to anything unpleasant. They were clever, but always very womanly women. I think she's a nice straightforward, clean-minded English girl. Oh no, I don't believe she'll be difficult."

"I find her very hard to understand," Mary com-

plained. "All the time I have a feeling that she is building up a wall between herself and me."

"Know what it is?" Jemmie asked. "Know what's the matter with you? You're growing old."

"Jemmie, what a horrible thing to tell me."

"Never mind, old lady. It's got to be. We're both growing old. I tell you I realize it more and more when I'm playing golf. Good night, my dear."

He offered himself to her salute without rising from the chair in which he was smoking his final cigar before a light autumnal fire in the library—the Badminton Library, as Muriel called it, for that collection of authoritative treatises on sport, together with some bound volumes of *Punch* and the *Illustrated London News, Handley Cross,* and a few novels by writers like Frank Smedley, constituted her father's literary environment.

"Growing old?" Mary repeated to herself on the way upstairs to her room. "Growing old?" she echoed once more when she stood in front of her mirror. The candlelight, apricot-shaded, flattered her reflection. Growing old at forty? What nonsense Jemmie talked! He forgot that he was fifteen years older than she. Now he certainly *was* growing old. How much he had aged just lately and how much he had improved with age! Dear old Jemmie, he really needed her far more than Geoffrey or Muriel needed her. He was much more a child to her than either of them. If it were not for Richard, she might begin to wonder if children were

much of a consolation for growing old. And Richard would be here to-morrow. But for how long? Mary felt sick and dizzy in a sudden thought of how brief his stay might be. If he really were ordered to the front? Was it credible that he should be? Richard in danger, and Richard how many thousand miles away! She had been proud and glad when he chose to be a soldier; but war had been so remote then. It seemed only yesterday that Jemmie bought High Corner, so that the children might always spend their holidays out of London. And now the eldest of those children was liable to be sent abroad to fight for his country. High Corner without children would not be High Corner any longer. But perhaps the war would soon be over. She must read the papers more carefully. She must not skip them as she did now. She must not rely on gossip about the duration of the war. She must learn to judge for herself. And Richard would be here to-morrow.

"I must not lie awake fretting," she decided. "I must get to sleep quickly. It will be time to fret when Richard is ordered abroad."

He arrived when the sun was driving away the wraiths of morning mist and when the others were all at golf. For her, when she saw him, so tall and straight and slim and fair, coming toward her along that green walk by the phloxes, he was more radiant than the sun.

"Hark, mother, do you hear that robin? That's

the first I've heard this autumn," he exclaimed as he bent to kiss her.

In the silence of their first embrace the birdsong passed into the dim green recesses of the day, vanishing like the voice of her son's vanishing childhood.

"Do you remember that fatal day when I killed a robin?" he asked.

"No, dearest, I'd forgotten that you'd ever killed anything."

"Why, mother, when I had that air-gun I killed everything I saw until that day."

"How you exaggerate, my Richard."

"Yes, I did indeed. But that day I'd missed everything, and then sitting on a branch of that oak, the one Geoff and I planted to shade us in our old age, I saw a robin. I fired and killed him, and I was so shocked at what I'd done that I've never really been able to kill even a partridge since with any pleasure."

"Always such a dear little boy," she exclaimed, holding tight to her son's arm.

"Was I?" Richard laughed. "I'm afraid I must always have kept my good behavior for you. Aren't your phloxes splendid this year? Best I've ever seen."

They paced the walk arm-in-arm, admiring the glow of color. At last Richard said:

"Mother, I've got something to tell you."

She knew immediately what it was.

"You're going to South Africa."

"Yes. I'm in the *Gazette* this morning. I thought you'd all have seen it."

"They went out to golf without reading the papers," she said, trying to keep her voice from trembling. "What regiment, darling?"

"Rifle brigade."

"Are you pleased?"

"Pleased to be a rifleman? Mother, of course I am!"

"I'm glad you're pleased about it, darling. I'm glad you've got what you wanted."

"My battalion is at the front."

She braced herself for the next question.

"And when do you think you'll have to go, darling?"

"Rather soon," he told her in his gentlest voice.

"Rather soon," she echoed in a whisper. "Shall we go and sit somewhere in the shade? The sun is so hot along this wall. I wonder the phloxes can stand it without wilting."

"There was a heavy dew this morning," he reminded her.

A heavy dew this morning? It was a day then, a real day in time. The date was in the almanac. It was not a dream. There was a heavy dew this morning, and Richard would be on his way to South Africa rather soon.

"And I suppose you'll have to go up to town about your uniform?" she asked.

"Yes, I shall have to see about my kit."

"And that will mean some of the little time we have left will be taken away from us."

"You could come up to town with me and we could have lunch somewhere," he suggested.

Yes, they could have lunch together, and then a week or two later he would be gone.

"Richard!"

He looked round in astonishment at the poignant exclamation of his name.

"No, I did not want to say anything," she told him with a sad smile. "Nothing more than 'Richard,' while you can still look round at me like that, while you are still here to look round at me."

The fine autumn weather lasted until Richard left for South Africa. His mother at his earnestly expressed desire did not go to Southampton to wave the last farewell. When he was trying to dissuade her from the journey, she felt as she used to feel when as a boy he had always tried to dissuade her from coming to Paddington to bid him good-by on the platform before he went back to Eton. They parted on the steps of Woodworth Lodge, and the carriage drove off with ghostly quietude along the road that was littered with dead leaves, drove off with her Richard in the yellow light of an October morning.

"Seems strange without him," said Jemmie, taking his wife's arm affectionately and guiding her when she stumbled on the stairs because the tears in her

eyes obscured all objects familiar and unfamiliar, all life indeed for the moment.

"Geoffrey's off to Oxford to-morrow, and then you and I shall be all alone, old lady, just as we used to be when we were first married twenty years ago."

Jemmie was evidently anxious to free his mind of the emotional discomfort that Richard's departure provoked by directing his emotion into the channels of a sentimentalized past; but Mary refused to follow his lead. She had only one idea, which was to be alone with her grief. She had no superfluity of idle regret, no lachrymatories of stale tears to be unsealed for Jemmie's gratification. She was inconsolable.

My darling Mother,

I hope you got my post-card from Capetown. Here I am at last with my regiment in the field. It was awfully nervous work finding out where they were, and I felt an awful fool when I had to walk into the mess after riding about ten miles and explain who I was. They were awfully decent to me, however, and luckily there was quite a decent dust-up with the Boers soon after I arrived. I was glad to get it all over at once. I mean both my joining up and going into action for the first time. Love to everybody and lots to yourself. I'll write a better letter when I'm more settled. I hear that we are going off chasing De Wet presently. They say we've really got him in a corner this time. It doesn't look

as if the war would go on for much longer. I'm really a year too late. That's the bad luck of it. Of course, there's still plenty to do, but it's nothing to what it was, they tell me. The regiment fought splendidly at Spion Kop. I wish I'd been there!

Don't read this letter to anybody except Father, and don't let him have it to take with him when he goes to golf. Just read it to him at home. Once more with lots of love,

Your loving son,
Richard.

My dearest Mother,

I've quite settled down at St. Mary's. I'm sorry I've not written more often this term. I shall be going down next week and I've been asked to spend the week before Christmas with a man in my year called Whittington-Jones, an old Carthusian. His people have a rather decent shoot in Norfolk. I wonder if you could get Father to lend me his guns. He practically never shoots now. I suppose you wouldn't mind if I asked Whittington-Jones to come to Woodworth Lodge soon after Christmas? He is rather keen to trot around the theaters, and so am I, I'm bound to admit.

I wonder if you could manage to lend me £100? I know this sounds rather a large sum to want in my first term, but the fact is I seem to have spent rather more than I meant, and I had to borrow £75 from a man in my year. I bought one or two pictures for my rooms, and I also lost a bit at roulette one night

at the House. I didn't really mean to play, but I couldn't very well sit looking on without seeming rude, because I had been dining with a House man. I lost more than I meant. I don't like to ask Father for the money because he'll jump to the conclusion that I'm gambling, which of course I need hardly say is not the case. If you could manage to get me out of rather an awkward hole just this once I promise not to run any risks again. Will you let me know as soon as you can about Whittington-Jones coming to us after Christmas and also about the £100? The extra £25 is for expenses during the vac. I shall have some tipping to do in Norfolk. If Father consults you about a present for me at Christmas, would you mind suggesting a check? It's awfully hard to choose a suitable present, though of course there are lots of things I should like for my rooms. But a check would really be more useful. I don't think there's much to tell you about Oxford. It's been very foggy there for the last few days.

Your loving son,

Geoffrey.

My dear Mother,

I'm sorry I have waited so long to answer your last letter, but we have been fearfully busy rehearsing for our Break-up. I am acting Gratiano in the trial scene from "The Merchant of Venice." Celia Wentworth, the girl who plays Shylock, is most dreadfully good. Miss Bewick considers her simply marvelous. She says that ever since she has been

elocution mistress at the school she never has known such a good Shylock. I wonder if I could invite Celia to spend a few days with us during the Christmas holidays. She is fearfully keen to see some theaters, and we've made out a gorgeous list of things we're simply dying to see. Celia says that the way I play Gratiano helps her most frightfully, and Miss Bewick was tremendously complimentary. The blot on the performance is the Doge played by a girl I hate called Marjorie Lane. She simply won't learn her words, and at the first rehearsal without books she cut out all the middle of her long speech and said "the world thinks and I think so too, we all expect a gentle answer, Jew." You should have seen Miss Bewick's face. Of course we all snorted like anything, and Marjorie could only sit there and giggle in that affected way she does. Celia says she hopes she won't do that on the afternoon of Break-up, because the audience is sure to laugh, and Celia thinks it may spoil her performance. I hope you and Father are going to turn up in force, and when you come do please invite Celia to stay with us in January.

Your loving daughter,

Muriel.

Geoffrey and Muriel had their friends to stay with them as they wanted; and continuous chatter about the world of Oxford and the world of school, from both of which worlds their mother perceived herself infinitely remote, made her feel still more

hopelessly banished from the only world where she cared to live, the world of South Africa and war. Perhaps if her two younger children had been able or anxious to appreciate what she was suffering from Richard's absence she would not have grudged them their gayety. It was not that she wanted them to devote themselves entirely to her. That would be an unworthy maternal egotism. But such a complete absorption already in other interests was surely not what most mothers had to endure from their children.

"Muriel, haven't you anything to tell me about your life at school?"

"Oh, mother, I'm always telling you things."

"But only about the other girls, dear child."

"Well, what else is there to tell you?" Muriel countered.

"Don't you ever want to tell me anything about yourself and your thoughts and what you would like to do when you grow up?" her mother persisted.

Muriel frowned.

"I wish you wouldn't always be imagining that I have any thoughts as you call them. You always ask such impossible questions, mother."

Mary turned away with a sigh. It was not thus that she had pictured her daughter at fifteen when ten years ago she used to enter the nursery on tiptoe and steal through the dim hush to where in her cot Muriel lay sleeping as still as a gathered carnation.

It was not for this Muriel that she had peered into the future, not for this Muriel that she had stood in the door on her way out and looked back to see that the night light was burning faithfully in the glimmering saucer.

"Geoffrey, you and your friend Mr. Whittington-Jones, never seem to talk about anything except horses and cards."

Geoffrey, remembering that he owed his mother a hundred pounds and that a time might come when he should wish to extend this obligation, tried not to look irritated by the question. The result was an expression of patient long-suffering, which irritated her.

"Really, my dear boy," she exclaimed, "there is no occasion for you to assume that expression of injured innocence. You do talk a great deal about horses and cards."

"Well, the men I know best are interested in horses," Geoffrey muttered. "And surely one can be interested in horses without being jumped on?"

"I'm not jumping on you, dear Geoffrey. I don't think I ever jumped on anybody. Sometimes I think it would be better if I did jump on people. I do hope that you will try to make the best of your time at Oxford. It would be such a pity if you wasted these years. You would always regret them and wish you could have them all over again."

Geoffrey removed his weight from his right leg and put it upon his left.

"I know it's boring," his mother went on, "very boring to have a mother who tries to interfere with a young man's natural amusements. I don't a bit want to be a spoil-sport, but you know how horrified father would be if he thought you were gambling. Luckily I was able to help you out with that money. But I shan't always be able to help you, and I do so want you to help yourself."

Mary had tried not to bring Richard into the conversation in order to make a comparison. But before she could stop herself the comparison was made.

"Richard!" Geoffrey echoed, flushing. "I've never pretended to compete with him. And anyway you wouldn't expect a soldier on active service to have the temptations I have at the 'Varsity."

"What a mean remark! Unworthy of a brother!"

Geoffrey shifted back from his left leg to his right.

"Whatever I do and whatever I say is sure to be wrong," he muttered.

Mary turned away with a sigh. It was not thus she had pictured her second son at eighteen when ten years ago she had sat in the shade of the mulberry tree at High Corner, during that first delicious summer of their possession, and watched him turning somersaults on the bright lawn. Then her only fear for Geoffrey was that the blood might rush to his head from the energy of his exercise. How fool-

ish an apprehension that seemed compared with the present dread for Geoffrey's future!

Later in that month Queen Victoria died, and on the gray February morning when the funeral procession crossed London Mary found herself kept by the press of people from reaching Grosvenor Place, where Jemmie had been lent a window to watch with his family the passing of a great period, the end of a mighty reign, the obsequies of an august and noble woman. She turned aside into Hyde Park, vexed with herself for making a muddle of the occasion; but when she was out of the crowd and walking in comfort under the bare trees she was glad that she had not succeeded in reaching Grosvenor Place, for out of the gray air beyond the fume of gray boughs sounded the lament of Chopin's Funeral March, not as if it was being played by mortal instruments, but like a coronach wailed by remote winds, a threnody uttered by unimaginable waves.

Mary looked round her. There was no longer a human being in sight; there was only tree after tree in audience of that melodious lamentation. For a while her fancy was caught by the picture of that grave pageant moving across London to the music of those poignant cadences. Her mind went back to a year or two ago when she had seen the Queen driving along Kensington High Street, a little old woman in black nodding to right and left in acknowledgment of her subjects' welcome. Now that little old woman in black was being borne on a gun-car-

riage, nothing left of her domination save the orb and scepter upon the coffin in which she lay dead. The funeral strains of Chopin died away, and their place was taken by the heavier grief of Handel's Dead March, so solemn that one seemed to hear above the crash of cymbals the tread of mourning emperors and kings. Mary felt it was wrong of her not to have made certain of beholding the procession, that she had no business to be standing here alone among the trees. She started to hurry forward in the direction of the music, so that above the crowd she might catch a glimpse of the plumes and helmets and perhaps even of the white pall itself. It began to seem of the greatest importance that she should have this glimpse, for she was thinking that without it she should miss the most important public event in her time. To-day would surely be a landmark in time to which everything in contemporary life would be referred. She must hurry. Already Handel's solemn beat was becoming muffled and dying into silence beyond the Marble Arch. This silence was tremendous. She hurried on, panting for breath. There at last was that endless mourning edge of black spectators, and there above them the plumes and the helmets of the cavalry flashing and rippling. Had the coffin passed? Once more the silence was rent by the plangent strains of Chopin.

Mary turned away from the people and the procession; with all the air behind her melodious with

grief, she sought again the holy quiet of the bare trees. A little child, too young for the pomps of death, was running after a gay ball, while a Dandie Dinmont jumped in circles round her barking. In a moment Mary was walking under these very trees, herself of twenty years ago! How little they had changed, but herself how much. The melody in which at first she had found the expression of a world's sorrow for the death of a Queen, now rose with its yearning and fell with its despair upon her own life. It was identified with herself and so much the more poignant in consequence. It no longer expressed a nation's grief, but voiced instead all the regrets for what might have befallen herself. She was back again among these trees twenty-one years ago with Mac. It was a month later than this, she reminded herself, and although the trees were just as bare, the crocuses were in full bloom then. Yes, Mac was barking there beside her, and children were running after brightly painted balls. Still that wailing of the Funeral March! What did twenty years ago matter now? What did they count for now? More sharply sad, more passionately wistful in one supreme melodious sigh the refrain, seeking to express an incommunicable grief, died away into silence. If only Richard had not been ordered abroad! He would have been with her to-day. He would have waited for her this morning. Richard was not like Geoffrey and Muriel, not so forgetful of his mother as they were. Yet perhaps

she was unfair to her younger children. Perhaps, in her devotion to Richard, she had let them understand too well that she cared more deeply for him than for them. It might be her own fault if they were forgetful. And ten years ago she had not been fair to Jemmie. She had a great deal for which to blame herself. From to-day onward she would think more about other people and not be so ready to blame them, when it was she herself who was at fault. This was a solemn day in the history of England. She would try to make it a solemn day in the history of herself.

The mellow form of Kensington Palace came into sight. It looked exactly the same as it always looked. It was strange to think that more than sixty years ago the little old woman now being borne to the grave should have been a young girl in that Palace and there received the news of her accession. Here was no noise of music for the dead, but like the sound of running water the ripple of children's laughter. In the precincts of Kensington Palace the children were playing as usual with their hoops and their balls. The Queen herself may have played here as a child long before she was a queen. It was a spot sacred to children, not to the dead; sacred to the future, not to the past.

"Let me remember that thought," Mary said to herself. "And when I think of the day of the Queen's funeral I will always remember that I am not dead yet and that while I am alive I have a

future. I must be more sympathetic with Muriel, more patient with Geoffrey, more solicitous for Jemmie. And I must not fret for Richard, for my boy."

It was a pity that Geoffrey went back to Oxford the day after the funeral and that Muriel went back to school. Mary felt that from the state of mind she had achieved on that day she might have drawn closer to her children.

The first year of the new century came to its Spring, blossomed and shed its blossom, opened to its Summer and reached its Autumn without Mary's hopes of a deeper intimacy being realized. She began to wonder if Richard would return from South Africa as much a stranger as the other two. His letters betrayed no falling off in affection; but affectionate letters might be the result of habit and not reflect the man that was being wrought out of her boy, down there beneath the unfamiliar Southern stars.

In her maternal loneliness Mary found herself more than ever inclined to adopt Jemmie. He would really have been a most satisfactory child if he would only have abstained from continually reminding her that age was creeping fast upon both of them. It was difficult to be motherly to a man who would talk all the time about his stiff joints and hardening arteries, who would grunt and groan when he rose from an arm-chair, and who after dinner had scarcely read half a dozen headlines of *The Times*

before he was fast asleep. Mary did not want to be as old as all that, and she wished that her husband would remember that there were fifteen years between them. Fifteen long years. Or was it only because Richard was away that the years seemed longer nowadays? They had fled by so swiftly when he was little. She must go in for gardening more seriously this Autumn. If Richard came back next Spring, he would appreciate her English flowers after Africa; and if he did not come back, the flowers would be a small consolation. It was a pity that she had begun so early to work among girls. That club would have been such an interesting occupation for the present. But if she began again now, it would mean arguments with Jemmie, who would never understand why, when he was always at home, she wanted to wear herself out ministering to a lot of strange girls. Strangeness was Jemmie's bugbear. Strange people, strange ideas, strange manners, strange places, strange clothes, they were all equally abhorrent to Jemmie nowadays.

"I may not be very distinguished or anything like that," he boasted. "But at any rate I'm not always running after new-fangled ideas. Some people would call me old-fashioned and consider me out of date; but I don't care what they call me or what they think me. When I was at school we used to kick fellows who tried to be original. We were rough and ready in those days, my dear, but, by

George, we were men! Yes, by George, m-e-n. Men!"

"I thought you were boys," Mary laughed.

"Now, my dear, you know perfectly well what I mean."

"Yes, yes, you foolish old thing, of course I know what you mean. And I wish you could make Geoffrey a little less original."

"Ah, Geoffrey! Geoffrey is becoming a problem. I cannot think where he inherits his low tastes."

"Haven't we agreed to call him original?" said Mary. "Don't let's bother about the hereditary side of his misbehavior. You and I between us must be responsible for him, and we ought to shoulder our responsibility. I really am worried about his future."

They were sitting in the garden of High Corner on a fine afternoon at the end of September, and surely never had the phloxes been finer than they were this Autumn. If Richard admired them last year, what would he have said if he could have seen them now?

Muriel had already gone back to school, so that Geoffrey, as the only child at home, became for the time the chief object of his parents' solicitude.

"You've always taken his part when I've tried to be severe with him," the father pointed out.

"Yes, I know I have, and I think rather foolishly. But I suppose it's natural for a mother. It's what remains of the instinct to defend one's young. I

wish he were a little boy again. I believe I should bring him up quite differently, if I had another chance."

Jemmie shook his head.

"Ah, if," he murmured sapiently. "If if's were horses, old lady, beggars might ride."

"Yes, and I think I've been rather foolish," Mary continued, "in keeping from you certain things about Geoffrey. You know, three times already since he went to Oxford I've lent him comparatively large sums for him to pay his debts. Gambling debts, I'm afraid."

"Gambling debts?" Jemmie echoed. "You don't mean to tell me that the young fool has been gambling? Gambling debts at nineteen? Why, the notion is ridiculous. Think of me. There was I, my own master from the time I left school. But I never had any gambling debts. I never had any debts at all. Why, when I was not much older than Geoffrey, my poor old father died and I was left in sole charge of the business. Suppose I had had gambling debts? A pretty stockbroker I should have made."

"There's no need for you to imagine that I'm trying to defend Geoffrey for running into debt," Mary observed.

"But why did you keep it from me? Why didn't you tell me before?"

"I know it was silly of me. I've admitted it was silly. Let that pass."

"How much have you paid for him?"

"About three hundred pounds."

"Three hundred what? Did you say three hundred pounds, or am I going mad and deaf? Three hundred pounds? Why, that's nearly a whole year's allowance. Do you seriously mean to tell me that you've allowed Geoffrey to play ducks and drakes with three hundred pounds of your money?"

"Frankly, Jemmie, I don't think that the amount matters," she said. "Three hundred pounds or three hundred pence, if he can't pay, the large sum is morally no worse than the smaller."

Jemmie began to splutter.

"Now that's a woman all over. No idea whatever of the value of money. It's not a question of morality, my dear. It's a question of finance. He knows very well, even if you don't, that he has no more business to risk three hundred pounds than I have to risk three thousand. A fine father my children would call me if I started gambling and gambled away all their inheritance."

"Jemmie dear, there is really no need for you to get angry with me," she protested. "I am as well aware as you how wrong it is of Geoffrey to gamble. But I do blame my own indulgence. I ought to have refused to give him the money and sent him to you. I don't know why I didn't. I suppose it was an absurd kind of jealousy. I suppose really that I hoped to make him fonder of me by giving him the money he wanted."

"But why have you told me now?" her husband asked in sudden bewilderment.

Mary looked unhappy.

"Promise me," she began, "that if I tell you something more you won't fly into a rage with Geoffrey and by losing your temper perhaps do him more harm than good. Promise me that, Jemmie, before I tell you anything more."

"He's not been stealing? He hasn't committed forgery or anything like that, has he?" stammered an apprehensive father.

"No, it's not quite so bad as that," she laughed sadly. "But you haven't promised."

"As long as it's nothing criminal, I promise to do my utmost to be patient with the boy."

Mary hesitated for a few moments, half regretting that she had raised the subject of Geoffrey's behavior. Then she plunged.

"It's this girl at the White Hart. Mrs. Woldingham came to see me this morning . . ."

"Girl at the White Hart?" Jemmie interrupted. "What has Mrs. Woldingham got to do with girls at the White Hart, even if she is the Rector's wife?"

"Jemmie, I must beg you not to interrupt me. If you will have the patience to let me say what I was going to say, you'll hear. Mrs. Woldingham, who came to see me about the Bazaar which is being got up for the debt on the new peal of bells, spoke very nicely about Geoffrey, and I'm sure she had not the least idea of making mischief or repeating village

gossip. But people are beginning to talk about Geoffrey's being seen so often at the White Hart."

"Drinking too!" the father apostrophized. "Great Heavens, my second son appears to have every vice."

"No, not drinking," Mary contradicted irritably. "At least Mrs. Woldingham did not suggest that he was drinking. The attraction is this girl."

"What girl?"

"The girl at the White Hart."

"Do you mean the barmaid?"

"I suppose that's what she is. I really don't know anything more except that Geoffrey is credited with having a love affair with some girl at the White Hart."

Jemmie shook his head to Heaven.

"I really don't know what's happening to the young men of to-day. They stop at nothing. Still, I'm relieved to hear it's only that. At least, I suppose it's only that."

"Only what?" Mary asked frowning.

"Only a flirtation with a barmaid. Of course, he ought not to do that kind of thing in his own village; but I'm relieved to hear it's only that."

"That was all Mrs. Woldingham said."

"She didn't suggest that there was the likelihood of an open scandal?"

Mary looked puzzled.

"Come, come," her husband scoffed. "You are not a schoolgirl. I suppose Mrs. Woldingham didn't

suggest that the young woman was going to have a child?"

"Jemmie, sometimes you really are unnecessarily coarse in the way you blurt things out. No, Mrs. Woldingham didn't say anything about that or indeed hint anything of the sort. At least, I don't think she did. But, oh dear, what a horrible notion! Please, I do beg of you, speak seriously to Geoffrey. If there were anything like that he would have to admit it to you."

When Mary was alone, she reproached herself for being so disloyal to Geoffrey as to tell his father about the money she had given him. It was no use trying to pretend to herself that her only motive for telling was a desire for Geoffrey to make a complete avowal of everything and after he had been forgiven to be able to start fair in his first encounter with life. She had not had the least temptation to say a word about his debts until Mrs. Woldingham had thrown out those hints about his behavior at the White Hart.

"I really believe I was jealous," she told herself. Jealous? Could she possibly be jealous of this girl? It sounded too absurd when stated in words. But there certainly had been an impulse to hurt Geoffrey and a desire to punish him not for his generally unsatisfactory behavior so much as for presuming at his age to fancy himself in love. It was not the knowledge that people were talking which had roused her indignation, but the suggestion that

Geoffrey was madly in love with this girl, this common, crude, flamboyant creature, this barmaid. Even now her heart was beating fast with rage at the thought of such a disgraceful entanglement.

"Of course, my dear Mrs. Alison, it may be nothing but a youthful infatuation. At the same time I think I ought to warn you that they do say he has proposed to the girl."

She had not told Jemmie that. She had unjustly allowed him to suppose that the only scandal to be feared was Geoffrey's treatment of the girl. Jemmie had jumped to the commonplace conclusion, and she had been able to do no more than simulate the shocked feelings of a prude. She had been annoyed by her husband's clumsy assumption of Geoffrey's guilt, and she had found no better way to display her annoyance than by that pretense of delicacy.

"One always thinks that one is going to find it easier to be better in a few years' time; but, when the few years roll by, there is always a new trap for one's self-confidence," Mary reflected.

She made up her mind to be patient with Geoffrey, and went down to dinner with the intention of persuading Jemmie to be as patient as she hoped to be herself. But her good intentions were frustrated by Geoffrey's failure to appear.

"Keep nothing hot for Mr. Geoffrey," his father commanded.

Mary realized the extent of his wrath from this order, for nothing in life seemed more important

to Jemmie than the temperature of food. Deliberately to let his son's dinner spoil was in his case almost the equivalent of open excommunication. Another sign of his anger was manifested after dinner, when, before he fell asleep in his chair, instead of reading the headlines of *The Times,* the list of killed and wounded in South Africa, and the sum of Roberts' points at billiards, he neither read nor slept; when instead he paced up and down the drawing-room, always tripping on the same head of a grizzly bear shot by himself long ago in the Rocky Mountains, always saying "damn," always begging his wife's pardon for the oath with an implication that Cæsar as well as Cæsar's wife should be above suspicion in dealing with Cæsar's son.

"This is a bit too much of a good thing," he declared when the clock struck ten without Geoffrey's arrival. "A little bit too much of a good thing, by George! He's staying down at that confounded inn till closing-time. That's what he's doing, you mark my words."

Half-past ten struck; but there was still no sign of Geoffrey.

"If his highness thinks that he's going to keep the whole household up while he wanders about with that girl in the moonlight, he's mistaken. I'll lock him out. By George, I will."

"But Jemmie, he may have had an accident."

"Fiddlesticks, my dear. If he'd had an accident, we should have heard of it by now. I'll give him

until eleven. If he isn't home by then, the house shall be locked against him. I'll give him a lesson. I'll frighten him this time."

The clock struck eleven; but Geoffrey did not come. His father rang the bell.

"Please, Jemmie," his wife expostulated. "I'd rather you didn't say too much in front of the servants."

"You're weakening. You're not backing me up. You're perfectly ready to let him in. I tell you he has got to have a lesson."

"But the servants . . ."

"Bother the servants. I decline to let Geoffrey flout me, because I'm afraid of the servants."

However, Jemmie did so far humor his wife as to imply when he was giving orders to lock up the house, that he and she knew where their son was.

"Although I was in half a mind to forbid anybody in the house to go downstairs and let him in when he does come."

"I'm glad you didn't," Mary said. "I think that would only have made ourselves look ridiculous."

She resolved not to go to sleep, so that when Geoffrey did come back, she should hear him herself and be able to go downstairs and let him in. She felt certain that she should be able to do this and that Jemmie, who had announced his own intention of admitting this errant son, would be fast asleep by that time. Jemmie must be very sleepy by now, for he had been awake ever since dinner.

But Geoffrey did not come back at all that night, and in the morning his mother received a letter.

Hawkins' Hotel,
Buckingham Street, Strand, W.C.
Sept. 27*th*, 1901.

My dearest Mother,

I find this a very difficult letter to write, but it has got to be written, and you may as well know at once that by the time you get this letter I shall be married to Mary Wyatt who was at the White Hart Inn. I made up my mind to do this a month ago and I would have told you if I had not been afraid that somehow or other I would have been prevented. Of course I know that you and Father will be angry, but it can't be helped. It's done now. At least it will be by the time you get this. I'm going out to make arrangements now. Of course I'm rather worried about what you will say, but she is a charming girl and if you could only get over your prejudice and meet her I think you would agree with me. She is only three years older than me. Of course I cannot dictate what you are or are not to do. But unless you can see your way to being decent to Mary I would rather cut myself off from the family altogether. It would only make me angry if I thought she was being snubbed, and she is very sensitive. I am sorry for the way I am getting married, but please do not think that I am sorry about getting married, if you can understand what I mean. If

I am old enough to know what profession I want to choose, I am old enough to know what wife I want to choose. I mention this because Father said to me last week that if I hadn't made up my mind yet what I wanted to do with my life, I never would make up my mind. I'm afraid this letter sounds rather defiant, but it's not meant to be defiant. Only I do want you both to understand that I'm in earnest. I will spare you the boredom of hearing how fond I am of Mary, partly because I know it would probably bore you and partly because I could not possibly express what I would like to say about her in writing. I know that this will mean giving up Oxford. But I do not mind about that. I think most people stay there too long. It's no good doing nothing for three years. We are going to stay for three or four days in London, and then we are going to spend our honeymoon in the village where Mary lives in Berkshire. After that I had an idea of emigrating to Canada.

Your loving son,
Geoffrey.

Mary gave this letter to her husband without comment and left him to read it alone. She did not feel that there was any possible comment except an outburst of bad language, and she was sure that Jemmie would manage that better than herself. When she rejoined him, he was still spluttering with rage, damning and disinheriting his son with equal

fervor. For one thing Mary was grateful. He did not say it was all due to the way she had spoilt him. Indeed, he offered no reproaches. The blow was as inevitable as an apoplexy. There was no human being to be blamed apart from the unhappy principal.

"Married at nineteen to a barmaid! What a future! It isn't as if I'd set him a bad example. I can't blame myself. It's his natural wickedness and selfishness. It's the sort of thing young men do nowadays. No sense of decency. Want of proportion. Form . . . no good form. Fancy comparing the choice of a profession with the choice of a wife! You can't compare things like that. The boy's mad. He's been touched by the sun playing golf. He's not normal. I consider we might get the marriage annulled on the ground that he was *non compos* when he committed it. Yes, *non compos!* We'll shut him up in a nursing-home for a couple of months. A rest cure. He's mad. The damned lunatic! Emigrate indeed? Canada! He might as well talk of emigrating to the moon. In fact, it strikes me that's the place to which his brains have emigrated . . ."

Jemmie went on railing like this until his wife interposed with a suggestion that she should go up to town this very morning and interview Geoffrey. There was just a chance he was not married yet. He probably had not realized how hard it was to get married without some preparation. Yes, there

was just a chance that he was still free, and that if he were tactfully handled he might consent to remain free.

"You see, he's evidently nervous about us," Mary pointed out. "He had to run away in order to bring himself to do it. I expect the girl is a hussy. I expect she hooked him. Oh dear, how vulgar it makes oneself, when one mixes oneself up with vulgarity. Hooked him! And yet there's no other word for it."

"He's no longer a son of mine," the father swore. "By George, Mary, he is no longer my son. A lazy spendthrift who gets married with less preparation than he would give to ordering himself a lunch. This money he's been wheedling out of you. Depend upon it, his gambling debts were nothing but an excuse, a mean subterfuge. If he'd really been losing money at roulette, he'd have come to me. He'd have known that I wouldn't be hard on him."

"I should prefer to think that the money I gave him was spent upon getting married," said Mary unreasonably. "I loathed the idea of my son's being a weak gambler."

"Well, don't let you and me start arguing. Whatever he did with it, he has had the money. A barmaid! A girl who spends her day listening to beastly chaff! A crimped, corseted, vulgar barmaid to be my daughter-in-law! It's incredible."

"But there is a slight chance that she is not your daughter-in-law yet. So, if you've no objection,

dear, I think I'll catch the midday train and go straight to this hotel in the Strand. I will take my dressing-case, and if necessary I can stay in town. I might go to Morley's Hotel. That would be close by."

Hawkins' Hotel was a tall, narrow, gloomy house with a German porter, sluttish chambermaids, and a manageress like a large doll with hair of tow. In the lower half of the house there was a perpetual odor of vegetables being cooked, and in the upper part there was a smell of dusty muslin.

Mary was shown into what was called the writing-room while inquiries were made for Number Nineteen, which was as far as Geoffrey's individuality was recognized. In each of the windows of the writing-room there was a frayed aspidistra growing apparently in a compost of cigarette-ends, matches, and old plaster. In one corner of the room a man in a stained check-suit with cuffs that were continually trying to swallow his hands was seated at a spindle-shanked desk working out from a Bradshaw fifteen months old a railway journey across country.

"Number Nineteen's gone out," announced the waiter, who looked like the negative of a photograph, so black were his face and shirt-front, so greasy and begrimed were his clothes.

Mary told him that she would wait and asked him to bring her a cup of tea, which he brought half an hour later in a breakfast cup with blunted lumps

of dead-looking sugar lying in the saucer beside it, and a hare-lipped jug of pale blue milk.

"I'll bring the bread and butter in a minute," he promised, and though Mary told him that she did not want anything to eat, he brought her four slices a quarter of an hour later.

It was growing dusk in the writing-room of Hawkins' Hotel; the man in the check-suit, unable to read the figures in the railway-guide, was moping in an arm-chair by the empty grate, before Geoffrey came in followed by the waiter, who lighted the two burners of the gaselier which had been fitted with incandescent mantles and pulled down the blinds.

"We can't talk here," said Mary, glancing across at the man in the check-suit, who as soon as the room was lighted up had returned to his railway-guide. "You'd better walk round with me to Morley's Hotel, where I'm staying for to-night."

"I can't leave Mary alone here," Geoffrey replied.

His mother winced at the name.

"If you want to talk private," said the man with the railway-guide, "I'll leave you to yourselves. I've found what I was looking for."

He pushed his cuffs well up with the aid of the edge of the desk, and, whistling "The Honeysuckle and the Bee," went out of the room, leaving mother and son together.

"Geoffrey, are you married?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, no, I'm not," he admitted sulkily. "Apparently you have to live in

a parish for a certain amount of time first. One would imagine it was a crime to get married by the difficulties the parson made."

"Then you'll think better of it?" his mother pleaded. "You'll change your mind and come back with me to High Corner? Father will say nothing. Your mad freak shall be forgiven and forgotten."

"Steady on, Mother. I can't leave Mary like that. You see, it's a bit awkward. I thought I should have been married to-day, and so we should have been if I hadn't made a muddle about the license. I wanted to be married in a register office, but Mary stuck out for a church. She can't believe that any other kind of marriage is genuine. Besides, I don't want to give her up, if that's what you mean by coming back to High Corner."

His mother argued with him in vain. He did not attempt to answer her, but stood sulkily first on his right leg, then on his left leg until she stopped talking.

"I don't agree with you that she'll drag me down, as you say. I think it will buck me up to be married."

"But, my dear boy, look at your surroundings already. Look at this horrible hotel. How on earth did you ever come to discover such a place? It's like some dreadful place in a French novel."

"The bedrooms are all right," Geoffrey said. "And we've been eating out. I think if you'd let me bring Mary down to see you, you wouldn't be so

much upset by the prospect of my future. Anyway, you needn't think I'll disgrace the family. I've made up my mind to emigrate. It's a funny thing, but when a fellow does what he thinks is the right thing to do, he gets more blamed than if he just plays about with a girl."

"Geoffrey," said his mother, "I'm grieved that I cannot see things from your point of view; but you are too young, my dear boy, to hamper yourself like this so early in your life. I have never told you before; but I think that it is only fair that I should tell you about your grandfather. He quarreled with his father because he insisted on marrying my mother. They emigrated, and both he and my mother were drowned. I was a baby then, and I was about the only person saved from the wreck."

"Well, it's much safer traveling nowadays," argued Geoffrey obstinately. "And anyway I don't see that it did you much harm."

"But it caused infinite misery to others. My grandmother never really got over it. It brought about the extinction of the Flowers."

"I'm sorry, Mother, but I can't go back on my word. Besides, we've been living here as man and wife. It wouldn't be right."

This boy of nineteen to be talking of living here as man and wife!

Mary was suddenly chilled.

"Very well, Geoffrey, if you will not listen to me, I must see what your father can do. You must re-

member that you are not yet of age, and if your father sees fit to exercise his authority you will *have* to obey. I shall telegraph for him at once."

"Perhaps Father will condescend to see Mary before he does anything," Geoffrey said. "Perhaps he won't judge her as you have judged her without seeing her."

Mary turned away from her son and went quickly from the room. She felt when she walked up Buckingham Street as if she was struggling up through some horrible drain to reach the air.

In the hall of her own hotel the porter told her that Mr. Alison had arrived and was waiting for Mrs. Alison in Mrs. Alison's room. Mary went upstairs, glad that he had come, because he might do something with Geoffrey. He might remonstrate with the girl and persuade her to give him up. In books it would have been herself who would have done that; but books seemed to forget that a mother could be as proud as anybody when her deepest feelings were outraged.

"Mary, my poor little wife, prepare yourself for a dreadful shock," Jemmie cried when she entered her room.

In an instant she guessed that it was bad news about Richard.

"South Africa," she heard herself murmur with a tongue that was parched with apprehension and horror.

"A telegram from the War Office."

"Jemmie, he's not dead? He's only wounded?"

"My poor darling Mary, our boy is dead."

"Richard! Richard! Richard!" she wailed to the roar of London, the cruel roar of London which let young men die to keep the city roaring.

"It wasn't even in battle. He was in charge of a convoy. He was ambushed. By God, Mary, I'd like to burn the scoundrels in Parliament who talk about brother Boer. I'd like to throw them down into Trafalgar Square from the top of Nelson's Column. Lloyd George and the whole skulking crew. It's they who are encouraging the Boers to go on with this guerilla warfare. Mary, don't look so white. Shall I ring for some brandy? Did you do anything about Geoffrey and this marriage?"

"Geoffrey!" the mother echoed, and her voice was like the tinkling of broken ice. "Let him do what he likes, and go where he likes, and die where he likes. I want Richard. Do you hear? I want Richard. I want him. I want him. He's mine. He can't really be taken away from me like this. There must be some mistake in the name. Mistakes are made. We must go to Africa and make sure. *We'll* emigrate," she laughed, and then mercifully the tears began to flow.

Chapter Six

THE WIDOW

Chapter Six: The Widow

JEMMIE ALISON had been buried a fortnight. The rays of the fallow November sun lighted the table in the window of his old study at which his widow was seated engaged upon the task of sorting out his papers. Mary's hands frilled with snowy organdie were now the hands of her grandmother when *she* was fifty, fifty years ago. Otherwise she did not resemble Lady Flower, being of a fairer complexion with roses still fresh upon her cheeks and rich brown hair on which the gossamer spun by age was less conspicuous than the first rime upon October leaves. She had paused for a moment from her task and was staring out at the drooping chrysanthemums that gave to the garden of Woodworth Lodge such an aspect of mournfulness and decay. Why did not Markham take them up? There was nothing so melancholy as flowers which had outstayed their season. Winter was at hand. Of what use was it to try to prolong the illusion of summer? Winter was not to be cajoled by such pretenses. Besides, chrysanthemums were at best funereal blossoms. How high they had been heaped a fortnight ago, wreath upon wreath, on Jemmie's coffin. . . . She turned back to her task of sorting out the papers; but a minute or two later she stopped

to reproach herself, as she had reproached herself many times daily since her husband's death with having failed to be as deeply moved by it as she ought. No doubt the protracted illness, when he lingered month by month after the doctors had declared that he could not survive another week, was partly responsible for the absence of emotion. She had been preparing so long for the death that, when at last he did die, she discovered that there was no emotion which she had not already exhausted. Yes, although while he lay dying all those weeks she had fought against a monstrous and wicked hope that the agony would not be too long protracted, at the end her only definite feeling had been one of relief. Poor old Jemmie, he had been so good throughout those weary weeks. The nurses had assured her that they had never known such a patient. It was strange that a man who throughout his life had allowed himself to be disconcerted by the smallest interference with his minor comforts should be able to endure without a murmur months of fierce pain. There must have been something fundamentally noble about Jemmie, some bedrock of character impervious alike to violent passions and the fretful whims of ordinary existence. Impervious at any rate to the latter. It was verging on the ludicrous to associate violent passions with Jemmie, for surely no man ever lived less subject to the stress of the unattainable. Not that his exemption should detract at all from her admiration

of his suffering. On the contrary she should yield him a greater respect, because he could never have been tested in the whole of his life as he was tested every hour of that last illness. But herself? Had that endlessly drawn out vigil revealed in herself any fundamental nobility of character? Outwardly she had been all devotion. She had accepted the flattery of the nurses, the laudation of her friends, the pathetic gratitude of her husband for the care she lavished, the zeal with which she waited on him. the affection never in all their married life so freely given as when he lay dying. Yet always at the back of her mind had lurked the question when it would be over, the desire to be quit of her obligation, the longing to be herself for the remainder of her life. Or was she doing herself an injustice in thinking that? Was it not really the nervous strain of expecting the inevitable for so long which made her sigh for that consummation to achieve itself? It was foolish to exaggerate one's deficiencies. It savored of a morbid self-interest. These inward contests in which women permitted themselves to indulge, especially in books, were nothing more than a subtle form of self-flattery. They were another aspect of the schoolgirl's habit of talking a situation to death. The female mind could never resist the remnants of a conversation a whit more easily than it could resist a July sale.

Mary compelled herself to concentrate upon the task she had taken in hand, and for a while she was

able to keep her thoughts fixed upon her husband's papers. How neatly he had kept his receipted bills until January of this year. Here was a thin sheaf for 1910, the record of the last month he spent walking about before he took to his bed. There had been plenty of bills all through this year for doctors and nurses and medicine, and at last for the funeral. But it was she who had kept them, so they were lying about anyhow. How vexed Jemmie would have been with her if he had known that she had already mislaid the undertaker's receipt.

"I wish you would try to be more business-like."

She could hear his voice so plainly that she looked round the room, and noted with a pang of regret that this pallid sunshine was not so weak but that it lighted up the dust upon his empty pipes. Was it conceivable that Jemmie was regarding her at this moment from another sphere? Was there really anything in spiritualism? She had wished to experiment with it after Richard was killed; but Jemmie had been so contemptuous of the idea and so profoundly convinced of the fraud it was, that she had lacked the courage for a real investigation. There was no Jemmie now to deter her. She must have a talk with Mrs. Hippisle who so firmly believed in the possibility of communicating with the dead . . . yes, it would make such a difference if one could only be sure.

1909? Nothing but bills in that file. It would be prudent to keep them. Not that it was likely

one of Jemmie's tradesmen would be dishonest. He had always patronized the oldest and most respectable firms in London. Still, there might be a clerical mistake. Better to keep 1909. 1908? She turned the leaves of that file. To one Angora coat . . . to cuffs for same . . . to one large bottle of Crinum . . . to one large bottle of Doctor Gunter's Hair Tonic . . . to one large bottle . . . Jemmie had never ceased to abuse hair-restorers, but in his sixty-third year he was still the victim of their audacious promises.

If she did decide to take up spiritualism, she should not be so gullible as that. Why, Jemmie had begun to lose his hair before he was married! 1907, 1906, 1905, 1904. All receipted bills. 1904? A letter in Geoffrey's handwriting. That was queer.

Hopkinsville,
Ontario,
April 4th.

My dear Father,

Thank you very much for the check you sent me. I am hoping very much that the milk business will turn out as well as I hope. I now owe you £420. Do you want me to send you a formal I.O.U.? Or will this acknowledgment by letter be enough?

Your affectionate son,
Geoffrey.

It was strange that Jemmie should never have mentioned that he was giving Geoffrey money. And stranger still that he should keep his son's letter with the receipted bills of hatters and hosiers. Perhaps there were other letters. Mary examined again more carefully the recent files. Yes, here was another that spoke of receiving money two years later, written from Winnipeg. And here, why here in 1909 was a letter from London!

45 Almond Terrace,
Wood Green,
November 15.

My dear Father,

Thank you very much for the £100 which brings up my debt to £930. I shouldn't have bothered you again, but the expenses of getting back from Canada and the birth of our little girl have made things rather difficult. I am going in for the cinematographic business which from what I can see looks like being the business of the future. I've got a job as studio manager with a new firm who I hope will prove to have some staying power. I don't think any good purpose would be served by my coming to see you. I've kept out of your way for so long now that it's better to keep out of the family for good. It would be useless to pretend that Mary doesn't feel a certain amount of resentment, and now that we have our little girl we get on very happily. Please do not misunderstand my motive in

writing to you like this. If it was only you I might take a different course. But there is Mother to be considered. She would feel—quite rightly from her point of view—that the baby ought to be brought up in different surroundings. This would only cause bad feeling between her and Mary, which I would not like. I haven't made such a terrific success of my life, and so I am perhaps a bit oversensitive. It seems very ungrateful to write like this after your kindness, but I hope you will understand that I'm trying to act for the best. I am sorry to hear that you've not been feeling quite yourself lately. I hope it's nothing more than the effect of the beastly weather we've been having. I'm glad to be back in England again. I don't know what made me choose Canada as a country to settle in.

Your affectionate son,
Geoffrey.

Geoffrey had written this only a year ago. Perhaps he was still at the same address. Mary felt inclined to order the car so that she could drive immediately to Wood Green, wherever Wood Green was, and find out. She had risen from the table before she remembered that Muriel had taken the car for the afternoon. But to-morrow she would go. Nothing should stop her to-morrow.

Poor old Jemmie, he must have been pining for his son. He must have had a vague presentiment

of his last illness. And how extraordinary that he should have said nothing about the birth of Geoffrey's little girl. To have lain there all these months silent about that great event! It was strange too that he should not have left any money to Geoffrey. Perhaps he had known when he left in his will everything to her that she would find out from his papers about Geoffrey and the little girl, and had trusted to her to make some provision for them. It might be that all those years he had been anxious for a reconciliation and that he had waited for a word from herself to give him an excuse to make the first move. He would have been too proud of his own accord to propose the reconciliation; but if he could have salved his pride by pretending that he was receiving Geoffrey back into the family on her account, there was no doubt that he would have done so. Oh, it was clearly her duty to go to-morrow and find out if Geoffrey was still in Wood Green. It was her duty to the dead man and to her own self. Few might be the gray hairs of her head, but heavy had been the frost upon her heart all these years of middle-age. The more she thought about it, the more remarkable appeared Jemmie's secretiveness. What could have been at the back of his mind? To be sure, when first Geoffrey married, it was she who had been of all the bitterest against him. But there had been some justification then. She had not stayed implacable. Yet she had never suggested a reconciliation, which

it was her place to do. Jemmie might be pardoned for supposing that she did not want one. But what a pity! He would have died more happily if he had been friends at the last with the only son left to him. How much she hoped that he could be looking down from that mysterious hinterland of death, and that he might behold her setting out tomorrow on her mission of good-will.

How far had she got with the papers? Oh yes, 1904. 1903? Nothing from Geoffrey in 1903. Nothing from him in 1902 either. She wished that Jemmie had kept his first letters from Canada, for there must have been earlier letters. Those first hundreds of pounds must have been begged for with tales of misfortune in Canada. Or had Geoffrey written casually in the beginning as he used to write to her from Oxford for a hundred pounds? Perhaps that was the reason why his father had always spoken bitterly of him in those first years of the marriage. 1901. Mary turned pale. Here was the bill for Richard's uniform. *Received with compliments and thanks* . . . the money that equipped her boy to be killed. The paper with its royal warrants was as fresh as the day on which it was printed. But Richard! Her Richard! What was Richard now? And here in the file for 1900 was the bill for Richard's uniform as a cadet at Sandhurst. All these years going backward from this date held something of Richard. 1899? White waistcoats for Richard when he got

into Pop at Eton. How delighted he had been! 1898? 1897? 1896? Tophats for Richard every year. 1895? The right kind of Eton jacket, "because a chap at my private school told me to be jolly careful about that, mother." And Jemmie had remembered from his own Eton days how important it was to be jolly careful about that. 1894? School fees. 1893? Richard's straw hat with the second eleven ribbon of his private school. That hot summer of 1893 when they had moved in to High Corner for the holidays. 1892? School fees, and the bill for a bicycle in which Jemmie had invested to reduce his growing stoutness. That bicycle with cushion tires of which Jemmie had been so proud, but which almost immediately became old-fashioned by the invention of pneumatic tires. How Richard and Geoffrey had scorned his offer of it to them! They would not be seen dead on such an out-of-date old boneshaker; and two years later Richard had been given £7 10s. to buy from a friend at school a second-hand one with huge pneumatic tires. His first big present. It had made both him and his mother feel so very old.

1891? The doctor's bill when Richard had diphtheria. That was the year when she might have changed the whole course of her life. Ought she to have confessed the impulse of that May evening to Jemmie before he died? From the file of bills dropped a lilac-hued and even after twenty years still faintly lilac-scented scrap of notepaper.

Frivolity Theater,
May? Wednesday.

Darling old Podge,

I can get away to-night, so you must come. Thanks everso for the duck of a ring. My eye, won't it dazzle some of the mashers in the front row when we open next week. Lots of love.

From

Maudie.

1891? May, 1891? It could not be just a coincidence that this old letter was in the file of 1891. That must have been the year when Jemmie received it. And the month was May. That was the time when Jemmie was so frequently having to be away for the night on business. But why should he have filed only this note? It surely had no more sentimental value than many others he must have received from this Maudie. It must have been put away with his papers by accident. Perhaps this was the very note that kept him from coming home to dinner that night when Pierre came and when Richard fell ill.

"If I had known of the existence of this Maudie, would anything have kept me from going away that night?" Mary asked herself.

The sere chrysanthemums were lost in the wan radiance of the November sunlight: the sodden lawn and greasy London trees vanished: the outlines of other houses no longer affronted the vision.

Mighty palms cooled the fervid air with their green and glittering fans: their trunks were wreathed with odorous trumpet-flowers to steal whose honey came fluttering a myriad humming-birds with breasts of emerald and lapis-lazuli, and rubied wings, and tails of fire.

"My boys have cut a path before us through the forest. Let us ride through, my love, to the sea."

Perfume on perfume, color on color, with the forest stretching behind them and before them.

"You are tired, my love. Dismount. Here is a filanjàna in which you may travel through the forest to the sea."

A filanjàna, a filanjàna. Thus had Pierre named the palanquin in which he promised that she should travel with him in Madagascar. A filanjàna! A filanjàna! Swaying lightly in a filanjàna, she traveled on through the forest to the sea. Sun-birds and parroquets and purple kingfishers flew down the forest glade on either side of the gently swaying filanjàna; and so at last they came to the sea . . . the sea . . . to the nipped and withered chrysanthemums and the slimy city trees.

"If I had known that Richard would be killed ten years later, and that Geoffrey would run off with a barmaid, would I have gone away that night?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because I should have known that one day I should be fifty."

"Am I really fifty?"

"Yes. I am fifty, fifty, fifty. How strange that I should have remembered that word filanjàna. It had been hidden away all these years in a secret room of memory like a bit of jewelry that one buys on a voyage."

"Yes, but if I'm fifty, Maudie can't be much less. What happened then to her and what happened then to me matters nothing, to either of us."

"Poor Maudie!"

She could not have had any illusions about Jemmie, or she would never have called him Podge. It was not a name that could share a grand passion. A rose by any other name would smell as sweet. Still, Podge and Juliet. No, whatever Juliet might think about roses and Montagues, she would never have called Romeo Podge.

"But I need not reproach myself with not having told him about Pierre."

How long had Maudie lasted? Probably until Jemmie took up golf, and that was soon after they bought High Corner in 1893. He must have forgotten all about her, or he surely could not have been so indignant with Geoffrey when he was first told about the girl at the White Hart. Yet if Jemmie did involve himself in a romance, it was her own fault. She had never encouraged him to be romantic with her. When they were first married she had let him think that any kind of affectionate demonstrativeness was distasteful to her. It had

been. She had known nothing of life. Muriel was different. Somehow girls nowadays seemed able to find out much more. One could not imagine Muriel's marrying anybody, because her mother advised it. But it was time for Muriel to think about marriage. She was twenty-five. The modern girl was inclined to cherish her independence too long and too dearly. Next season it would be well to make a point of inviting suitable young men to the house. Perhaps, with the strain of Jemmie's illness, she had allowed Muriel's interests to be neglected. And Muriel herself was discouraging. She had always been remote even at school; but Newnham had made her more than remote. She was now as unapproachable as the inhabitant of a star. Jemmie, dead though he was, seemed nearer to her than Muriel. It was not surprising that she was still unmarried. Young men must stand in awe of her. Those calm cold eyes lacked any expression that might lead even the most self-confident young man to suppose that she could be thought of in connection with marriage. No doubt, as she grew older, she would acquire the warmth of humanity; but at present she was a statue. And then there was her Socialism. That was a very unattractive side of Muriel. That continuous drip of ice-cold water upon all existing laws and institutions, upon all creeds and sentiments and political opinions, could not but be alarming to the average young man. Why should she be so hostile to established beliefs? It was not as if she had

too much church-going forced upon her when she was small. She had had to go to church once every Sunday; but the rest of the day, at any rate when she was at home, had been hers without Puritanical restrictions to sicken her of religion for the rest of her life. Yet the contempt with which she spoke of Christians was quite unpleasant to hear. Moreover, she had a habit of attributing the worst motives to many dull but essentially worthy people, a trick of assuming that they did not in their hearts believe what they professed. According to Muriel the world consisted of idiots and hypocrites, an opinion which was not calculated to make young men fall in love with her. Nowadays, girls were really as great a problem as boys. No wonder people were beginning to have fewer children.

1890 . . . 1889 . . . 1888 . . . these early bills could all be burnt. Ah, there was Markham setting to work at last to clear the borders of the chrysanthemums.

Mary did not change her mind about her visit to Wood Green; nor did she allow herself to be deterred by Muriel's indignation at not being able to have the car in order to drive round the sights of London the Northern delegates to a conference that was being held in town.

"It's very inconvenient, Mother," she protested.

"I daresay it is, dear. But it would be still more inconvenient for me not to have the car this afternoon."

"You see I'd promised the committee . . ."

"I'm sorry, Muriel dear, but I am unable to let you have the car this afternoon. And your committee cannot complain. They are doing their best to make it impossible for people to keep cars. So really while they allow us to keep them, we had better make the most of them. You'll have to take your party from Sheffield in an omnibus. You can really see more of London from the top of an omnibus."

"The point is that it makes me look somewhat ridiculous," said Muriel.

"No more ridiculous than you would look tearing about London with these gentlemen in your mother's car."

Driving along to Wood Green, Mary wondered why they allowed trams on these crowded roads. They made it most dangerous for a car to drive fast; now that she was on her way to heal a breach that had endured ten years, every minute gained seemed of the utmost importance. It would be terrible to find that Geoffrey had left Almond Terrace a month ago for some unknown destination. He must have read in the *Morning Post* or in *The Times* the announcement of his father's death, and if he was still in London it was strange that he had not attended the funeral. A quarrel should not be allowed to endure after death. Of course, there was a chance that Geoffrey had missed the announcement and that he was actually unaware of his

father's death. London was so huge. One realized how large it was when one drove along roads like this, past clanging trams full of people, past side-street after side-street, each of them leading to other side-streets which led to others full of human beings who all lived in London just as one lived in London oneself. If Geoffrey had left Almond Terrace, she should never find him; and she might die without his knowing that she was dead, without his knowing that she had sought him out for a reconciliation.

"Does Mr. Geoffrey Alison live here?"

"Ye-es," grudgingly admitted what was evidently a landlady of the common vulturine type, beneath whose outspread apron lurked a fledgling. "Ye-es," she repeated. "Was you wanting to see him about anything?"

"Please."

"Well, he's out," said the landlady with a triumphant sniff. "And not likely to be back till late, what's more. Yes, he was out soon after ten this morning. Soon after ten—well, it was about five after as near as a touch—soon after ten, he was out. I suppose you're from the Pictures where he works? Any message, of course, as you care to leave with me I'll see he 'as it, and no one can't do more than that."

"But I wanted to see him myself," said Mary, pausing undecided upon the steps of the little two-storied house.

"Ah, there you are," the landlady rejoined. "Well, I can't do no more than what I've said. Leave off, do, Eric," she exclaimed, slapping her son's hand for some misdeed committed upon the apron that sheltered him from observation. "One don't know which way to turn with children sometimes, and that's a fact."

"Perhaps I could see . . . Mrs. Alison?" Mary suggested.

Little did the landlady know how much it cost her to make that simple inquiry.

"Mrs. Alison?" the woman echoed with a return of that first suspicion in her manner. "Well, I'm sure I don't know what to say. Eric! If you don't give over picking at my boot-buttons, my lad, I'll give you something to remember with next time. Stand up, you naughty boy. Who should I say wants to see Mrs. Alison?"

"I'm Mr. Alison's mother."

This announcement was altogether too much for the landlady, who without another word grabbed Eric by the hand and led the way upstairs to the lodgers' sitting-room.

"Here's Mr. Alison's mother to see you, Mrs. Alison," she exclaimed in the doorway, after which thunderclap she returned to her own intimate glooms at the back of the house, admonishing Eric to ush if he didn't want to get such a slapping as would properly ush him for a week.

As Mary entered, the woman who had ruined

her son's life rose from an arm-chair by the fire and putting a finger to her lips pointed to a cot.

"Molly's asleep," she exclaimed.

"My granddaughter," said Mary.

"My little gurl," replied the other with a burr that in these sharp-set London lodgings sounded strange. There was nothing about her except the accent to proclaim that she was rural. Mary remembered that Geoffrey had said she was three years older than himself. That would make her about thirty-two. She looked nearer forty with her thin-lipped anxious mouth, her fretful eyes, and needle-like fingers. It was hard to perceive now what beauty had charmed Geoffrey into marrying her. However, she did not appear blatant, which was something to be thankful for.

The two women had been watching each other in silence, when the child in the cot gave a low restless cry. At once they both made an instinctive movement to see what was the matter; but the mother was the quicker to bend over and murmur a few soothing words.

"Her teeth are fidgeting her," she explained. "She's been late in cutting them." In that instant she seemed to think that by saying so much she was offering her visitor more than she had intended to offer, and she drew close her eyebrows in a scowl.

"Not that my little gurl's teeth can interest you," she added scornfully.

"On the contrary," said Mary. "They interest

me enormously. I did not know until yesterday that I was a grandmother. As soon as I knew, I came to see my granddaughter."

"But you knew that you were a mother ten years ago. You weren't in any hurry to come then except to try and keep Geoff from marrying me. That was all your worry then."

"You must think of the situation from our point of view. Geoffrey was not even of age. It was our duty to protest against his committing himself to a marriage before he knew his own mind. But isn't it rather a mistake to argue about the past now? I am anxious to forget the past."

"Some people can forget very easily," said the younger woman, "others can't."

"You may not know that Geoffrey's father is dead."

"Geoffrey does know, so there. And he wanted to go to the funeral, but I said, 'No, you don't want them to think that as soon as your father died you was looking around for what you might pick up. You let well alone,' I said, and Geoff he took my advice. 'Your father's been dead to you,' I said, 'this many a year. There's no call for you,' I said, 'to attend his funeral all on your own. I'm not going to wear black for him,' I said. 'And I'm not going to his funeral, not if you was to ask me on your bended knees.' "

"Whatever you think about me," said Mary, "you've no right to speak like that about my hus-

band. Why, I've just found out that all these years he has been helping Geoffrey with money whenever he asked for it."

"He wouldn't ever have been asked for it, if I'd had my way. I'd sooner have starved in the gutter, *I* would. But Geoff's got no pride, Geoff hasn't."

"You should be the best judge of that," said Mary. She regretted the sneer as soon as she had uttered it, not because she minded hurting the feeling of her son's wife, but because it might jeopardize the object she had in view, which was nothing less than to be awarded the guardianship of her granddaughter. An immense jealousy had been roused in her by the sight of the sleeping child, and she was thinking how well she should know with all her experience the way to bring her up. It was imprudent to say anything that might increase her daughter-in-law's hostility. In order to obtain what she desired Mary compelled herself to think of this woman as her daughter-in-law.

"It's no use for you to be sarcastic with me," said Geoffrey's wife. "Geoff's tried being sarcastic once or twice. But he always got the worst of it. Always."

Mary had a vision of Geoffrey's existence during these ten years. She was filled with a profound pity for him, picturing him forever in rooms like these, the prey of his wife's tongue, the victim of her determination to drag him down to her level. It never struck her that the child in the cot whom she was so

eager to take for herself was probably the only thing that made his life endurable.

"I'm sure it's a mistake to be sarcastic," Mary admitted. "I'm sorry, Mary. You know I find it quite difficult to call you Mary, because it's my own name. I really came this afternoon to try to effect a reconciliation. I'm anxious to be friends. It's useless to live in the past. We should all be miserable if we did that, for we all of us make mistakes. It struck me that it might be difficult for you and Geoffrey suddenly to re-enter the family circle—a very small circle nowadays. Only myself and Muriel. So, I didn't suggest that you and he should come and live at Woodworth Lodge or anything like that. But what I thought was that perhaps you might be glad to let me assume the responsibility for that little girl in the cot. If she was allowed to live with me, you would of course be coming to see her often, and then gradually we should get to know one another, and this gulf between us might be bridged."

"Never!" cried the mother. "I wouldn't let you have my Molly for nothing. Not if she was going to die the next minute. I'd sooner for her to die than have her go to you. I suppose you think I'm not fit to look after my own little gurl? Well, you've made a mistake, let me tell you. I'm as fit to look after her as what you are. She's mine. She's not yours. She never shall be yours, not while I'm alive anyway. I suppose you think I ought to be so proud because I've married a gentleman that I ought to

sit still for the rest of my life with my hands crossed on my lap and do nothing. Only be proud. But I didn't marry Geoff because he was a gentleman. I married him because I loved him. I suppose you think a woman like me can't love? I suppose you think it's only ladies who can love? But that's just where you're wrong. I've loved him so much that I've been angry with myself for being so soft and carried on at him something cruel. You wouldn't have done that, would you? But I've nagged at him until he's been fit to jump into the lake, which is near where we were living at Hopkinsville. Only it isn't like a lake. More like a sea really. I suppose you think that I wouldn't dare to be jealous, just because I'd married a gentleman? I suppose you think I ought to have let him do just what he wanted? Not me. Why, he couldn't be half an hour late without I was ready to tear his eyes out to know where he'd been and what he'd been doing. I reckon sometimes he wished he'd never set eyes on me. But I loved him all the time. You needn't make no mistake about that. I've wished sometimes he'd beat me, but he never raised his hand to me. Not once. Though I've nagged him enough to make any man hit me, even though he might have been a gentleman. And then last year, when I'd given up all hopes of such things, my little Molly came along, and since she came I've been better with Geoff. I seemed to feel he belonged to me at last, because the kid's half him and half me, as I figure it out. And now you

come along and want to carry off my Molly. Never. That's my last word. Never! Perhaps if you'd come along before my little girl arrived and wanted to carry off Geoff, I might have let him go. I was fond enough of him to do that, I believe. Once I'd thought it was really for his good. But now him and me has never been such friends, just because we've got the baby. Our baby. His and mine. Not yours, and she never will be."

The child whose future was at stake was disturbed by the clamor of her mother's voice and woke up shrieking.

Mary waited a moment or two in embarrassment, uncertain how to get herself out of the room. In the end she went away in silence.

When she reached home, she sat down and wrote to her daughter-in-law:

Woodworth Lodge,
Campden Hill, W.,
November 9, 1910.

Dear Mary,

I am afraid that you misunderstood the spirit in which I paid you my visit to-day. I feel that you may have imagined that my proposal for you to let me assume the responsibility for Molly's future meant that the little girl would be taken away from you. What I intended was that she should be the means of bringing us all together again. Perhaps in a little time you will be able to look at the situa-

tion with less bitterness. I do so hope that you will. Please accept this check as a belated wedding present and

Believe me to be,
Yours affectionately,
Mary Alison.

To which she received the following answer from her daughter-in-law:

Dear Mrs. Alison,

Thank you for the check which I would rather not accept if you don't mind. I'm sorry I was rude when you came to see me, but I should only be rude again, and so it's better for you not to come.

Yours sincerely,
Mary Alison.

And from her son:

My dear Mother,

I'm afraid you will think us ungracious in the way we've received your kindness. I'm afraid that Mary allowed herself to give vent to a good deal of the resentment she has had ten years to accumulate.

I feel I ought to have written to you about poor Father's death, but for various reasons I was naturally a little shy of intruding myself at such a moment, which I'm sure you will understand. I expect you know that from time to time Father very kindly helped me with loans. I should like to be in a posi-

tion to repay these, but that is impossible. However, I seem to be fairly well fixed up now in a job, and I would rather not incur any more obligations. It is better, I feel, that Mary and I should continue to lead a life apart from the rest of the family. Please do not think that I am giving way to a false pride in taking up this attitude. I do feel that I owe a duty to Mary as the mother of our little girl. I wish I was a better hand at explaining myself. But she would never fit into the sort of life she would have to lead if she were to be "adopted" now. You may say that she never would have fitted in. I do not wish to give the idea that I am reproaching you for the past, but I do believe that if that day you came to the hotel where we were staying you had welcomed her as a daughter you would have found her responsive. She has become hard during these ten years, because, poor little girl, she felt that she had spoilt things for me. She was becoming really quite difficult to manage in her moods until Molly was born. But now, thank God, we are quite happy together, and so long as I can keep my job I believe that we shall go on being happy. I very much fear, however, that if she felt that she was not considered good enough to bring up her baby she would sink back into her former state of resentment, and the peace which we now enjoy would be destroyed.

So please forgive me, dear Mother, for the way we have received your kind visit. I do often think about you and wish that things had gone differently.

I want you to believe that it is very difficult for me not to come and see you. But I know that if I did I should be weak and try to persuade Mary to do what you want. And then there would be difficulties, and I am so tired of squabbles. I feel wretched at writing to you like this, but I've braced myself up to do it, and it's done.

Your loving son,
Geoffrey.

Geoffrey's letter did not have the effect upon his mother of a rebuff. At any rate she had no emotion of mortification or wounded self-esteem when she read it. She felt as if she had tried to bridge the chasm between the living and the dead and failed. Geoffrey had passed out of her life as irrevocably as Richard. She shivered for a moment in the chill of age and wondered how she should occupy herself for the remainder of her life. So long as Jemmie had been alive she had always had somebody who wanted her solicitude, but now that Jemmie was dead nobody seemed to want her. Yes, she ought to have behaved differently ten years ago. She ought not to have let the loss of Richard embitter her like that. It was her own fault that Geoffrey and his wife wanted to live their life apart from her. She could leave money to her grandchild. That was something. It was thoughtful of Jemmie not to attempt to say what was to be done with his money. Her own, of which he had always had complete con-

trol, naturally remained her own. It was to be hoped that Muriel would soon be cured of this Socialistic craze. She did not want to have her money spent upon furthering the schemes of faddists. Jemmie would have hated that. Jemmie was always so normal and sensible. If he did have that temporary infatuation, it was her own fault. Twenty years ago she had neglected him, and he had sought consolation elsewhere. Ten years ago she had neglected Geoffrey, and he too had found consolation elsewhere. Before it was too late she must make an effort to understand and sympathize with Muriel. She had perhaps been too ready to believe that the shyness and awkwardness of Muriel's youth sprang from a natural lack of affection. Not that Muriel was so very young nowadays; but the rift had begun when she was still a schoolgirl, and all rifts tended to widen with time.

"Dear child, I wish you'd tell me something about the various movements in which you're interested. I daresay I've been stupidly conservative in my attitude. You know, everything has changed very much during the last ten years. You'll have to be patient with people like me who were brought up to think that Queen Victoria always had been reigning and always would be reigning."

Muriel stared at her mother from those candid blue eyes of hers.

"It's rather difficult to explain suddenly in a few

words the culmination of centuries of human thought," she said.

Mary laughed.

"You mustn't snub me like that, Muriel, unless you want me to remain hidebound by my own prejudices and conventions."

"But, Mother, it isn't really worth while for you to believe in what I believe. You must be young to believe it. You must believe that before you die you'll see your dreams brought to pass."

"Am I so old then?"

"You haven't forty years of activity before you. I'm not being very discouraging when I say that."

"Have you forty years before you, dear child?"

"I hope so."

"1950," her mother mused. "So you think that, when you're fifteen years older than I, you'll see the millennium? It sounds a long way off—1950. But, Muriel, you've no idea how near it really is and how little people will have changed."

"You said just now how much they had changed in the last ten years."

"I think that in these ten years they have accomplished what ordinarily would have begun long before and taken longer. You can't expect to have another reign like Queen Victoria's."

"No, thank goodness," said Muriel fervidly.

"England wouldn't be England without that reign."

"The question is, 'Is England our England?' "

Muriel countered. "I should say that England belongs to a few rich people and that the reason why it does was the worship of money during the Victorian Age."

"I don't think that people worshiped money then more than they did at any other period of the world's history. People will always worship money, because people worship themselves, and they think that money gives them the opportunity to express that worship."

"It's disgusting," Muriel ejaculated.

"Yes, but have you ever thought how easy it is to be disgusted by anything to do with money when one has plenty oneself? I feel that the best that can be said for your Socialist state is that if nobody could have more than a certain amount and everybody had that amount it might end in people's despising money."

"Oh, my dear mother," Muriel burst in impatiently, "must you really trot out the old legend that Socialism means equal money for all? It doesn't really mean anything of the kind."

In a moment Muriel was embarked upon a passionate disquisition about the real aims of Socialism; and Mary felt with a thrill of pleasure that she had lured her daughter into revealing some of herself without being aware that she was doing so and in the knowledge becoming self-conscious and reserved.

After their talk, in which Muriel admitted that her mother displayed an unusual ability to understand

her point of view, there seemed the likelihood of a friendship springing up between the mother and daughter. Mary talked to her about Geoffrey, and it was agreed between them that Muriel should pay a visit to Wood Green.

"For perhaps with tact Geoffrey's wife may grow less suspicious of my advances. I was too precipitate when I visited them in November. I was so much distressed by the rooms and so much upset to think about my own behavior's being the cause of it all, that I foolishly suggested bringing the little girl to live with us here. But if you were to go, dear child, you would manage better than I can to reassure his wife."

A week or two later Muriel set out to pay her first visit; but when she reached 45 Almond Terrace the vulturine landlady told her that Mr. and Mrs. Alison had gone away without an address.

"There's nothing to be done now," Mary lamented. "I left it until it was too late."

"You did all you could, mother."

"*Now* when it's too late. By the way, dear, I want to give a few very quiet dinner-parties during May. You won't find them too much of a bore?"

"Not if you want to have dinner-parties, mother."

"Well, to be frank, I've been telling myself for some time that you ought to be thinking about getting married. You'll be twenty-six soon, you know, dear, and I *should* like to see you happily settled."

Muriel's face hardened to that old expression her mother knew and dreaded from her schooldays.

"Mother, I don't intend to get married. The idea is repugnant to me."

"But, Muriel dear, you'll forgive me for saying that you cannot possibly know unless you're married if marriage is repugnant. I can assure you that it's impossible to say anything about it beforehand. Now I was brought up in complete ignorance of facts that I know you consider the merest commonplace of knowledge. I did have a few qualms, I admit; but in my case those qualms were due to ignorance."

Muriel thereupon sprang her mine.

"I hadn't intended to say anything about what I'm going to tell you until next autumn; but it doesn't seem fair to let you give dinner-parties under the delusion that you're likely to make a good match for me by doing so. Mother dear, I've decided to become a sister-of-mercy, and so marriage is utterly remote from my thoughts."

Mary stared at her daughter in amazement.

"Muriel! You extraordinary girl! I thought you hated Christianity. I thought you abominated clergymen. Why, I thought you were only interested in Socialism. I'd no conception that you were giving your mind to religion. The two things seem poles asunder."

"Do they, mother dear?" said Muriel with a smile. "But now I can't imagine any socialism worth

having unless it is based upon religion. Equally I can't imagine any religion that isn't the inspiration of a true socialism. I've been thinking about this for a long time now—ever since I went to Midnight Mass last Christmas Eve. It reached me like an inspiration. The truth of it, I mean. My mind is absolutely made up."

Mary had never been so completely astonished in her life. She herself during these last months had wished once or twice that she had thought more about religion, so that now in her loneliness she might have possessed what was evidently to many women an absolute consolation for everything. But it was too late to begin, she had decided. And now here was Muriel wrapped up in religion apparently and taking it so seriously that she intended to become a sister-of-mercy.

"But how could you become religious just by going to a service at an unusual time?" the mother asked.

"I haven't become religious now," Muriel pointed out. "I hate religious people. Though that's a silly thing to say, because I am very 'religious' in a different sense. I tell you, I suddenly believed that Christianity was true; as soon as I believed that I wanted to devote myself to the service of Christianity. I thought that the life of a sister-of-mercy was the life for a Christian woman. I realized that all my theories about human nature were worth nothing without Divine grace to achieve them."

Mary had a flash of illumination.

"Then it was from religious motives that you suddenly became so much quieter and sweeter. I was congratulating myself on effecting that change. Dear child, I wish that I could be given an assurance like yours."

"I always pray that you may receive it."

"Thank you, dear child. That is very kind and thoughtful of you. Of course, I can't argue with you about your resolve. I have really no right to argue on such a subject. I only hope that you will find as much happiness in the life you have chosen for yourself as you might have found in marriage. Which I'm sure you would have found," her mother added.

In the autumn Muriel entered the Community she had chosen, and the widow was left alone in the big house on Campden Hill.

Chapter Seven

THE GRANDMOTHER

Chapter Seven: The Grandmother

MARY'S visitors had left early that December afternoon, and when François came in to turn on the light and draw the curtains, she told him that she would ring for him presently, because she had a slight headache and preferred to sit for a while quietly *dans la crépuscule.* The butler, who had a grave, ecclesiastical dignity, bowed and left Madame to her choice. In the door he turned for a moment and in a tone which deprecated anything that might savor of officiousness in the suggestion begged leave to ask if Madame would like her maid summoned. She shook her head, and he withdrew with another bow that sought to express his perfect comprehension of Madame's desire to be left entirely alone.

Paris was unusually still this afternoon, so still that one seemed to hear the twilight falling upon the world in blue waves of silence. Usually at this hour the *salon* was crowded with voluble women drinking tea or with men sipping port wine and nibbling ratafias. It was lucky that this afternoon when she had a headache they should all have gone so early. What was the time? Only a little after four. She ought to have told François that she would not be at home to anybody else who called. She made a movement

to ring the bell; but even so slight an action was seeming a bore, and she sank back again in the armchair, telling herself that François, most accomplished of servants, would know instinctively that she desired to receive no more this afternoon. She hoped that the headache would vanish before dinner, because it was so difficult to have a satisfactory *séance* unless one was feeling in just the right mood to concentrate. Madame de Sarlovèze had been so emphatic about the abilities of the new crystal-gazer who with remarkable predictions of her clients' futures and even more remarkable knowledge of her clients' pasts had deeply impressed all Paris this autumn. The success of a personality like this Sicilian fortune-teller helped one to realize that the war was over. Not that fortune-tellers had not flourished during the war. Indeed, they could never have been so prosperous; but it was like old times to hear one's friends talking about the latest crystal-gazer, the latest dancer, the latest tenor, the latest nerve-doctor as if until one had fallen in with the fashion and succumbed to their performances one was hopelessly *démodée*.

From some shadowy corner of the inner *salon* a Siamese cat advanced with outwardly an air of the most supercilious indifference, which was contradicted by miaows of greeting that were to the miaows of ordinary cats as a violoncello to a violin.

"Pierrette!" Mary exclaimed gladly.

The small cat flirted her kinked tail in response,

but lest she might seem to have displayed too much dependence upon a poor human being at once sat down and began to clean a slim chocolate paw.

"Pierrette! Aren't you coming to talk to me?"

The answering miaow was almost too deep for a violoncello's capacity. Indeed to call it a miaow was an insult to the jungle noise it was.

"The people have gone, Pierrette. Do come and talk to me. I'll give you all my attention."

Pierrette looked steadily at her friend from large round eyes, the pupils of which distended by the approach of night glowed in the firelight. Presently she drew near to Mary's chair, upon the brocade of which she defiantly sharpened her claws before jumping up with a trill on the black silk lap to which she had been invited. Here she settled down couchant to regard the fire.

"Dear little cat," Mary murmured.

Pierrette's ears twitched back to take in the endearment; the faintest quiver of her tail showed that she had heard, understood, and agreed with the description of herself.

"I was saying to myself that it was getting quite like old times in Paris."

The cat began to purr in approbation of European peace.

Mary stroked Pierrette's back, which was the color of *café-au-lait,* soft and glossy as chiffon velvet. Contact with the small and shapely creature upon her knee was soothing. The grace and youth

and vitality of the cat were so superabundant that the human being whom she had decided to favor by making use of was refreshed. It was impossible to feel old with this pulsating life so near to one. Mary patted her affectionately.

"Darling little cat!"

Pierrette's tail really wagged in response to such genuine admiration and love, and because her tail could not express quite all her appreciation she dug her claws into Mary's knee and pressed her warm body closer than before, purring now with a steady monotony of pleasure.

The dusk had deepened, and Mary's head drooped in meditation upon those old times. Had the move to Paris been a success? Or was not her enjoyment of life here an illusion caused by the stimulus of the war? Had her activity, her ceaseless activity during these last six years, in which her hair had grown white, been genuine or artificial? She had seen so many women pretending—not wilfully, but mesmerized into supposing that they really desired to be useful—yes, so many women pretending an activity that was only another aspect of a woman's lust for what was the fashion. Had her Red Cross work been anything more than that? Yet, after all, did the motive matter if the action was good and useful? Questions these that were unanswerable, questions that would never be asked if she were not suffering from the reaction. Thanks to the war her move to Paris had been a success, a great success.

She might have found it hard otherwise to have passed these last years. When in 1913, bored with the big empty house, she decided to give up Woodworth Lodge, her imagination had seized upon Paris as the place to live, because she was already beginning to exist only in the past. That meant old age. Youth lives in the future; middle-age stagnates in the present; old age lives again, but alas, in the past, lives with only the ghost of its former life, always in the past. Her first year in Paris had been occupied in furnishing the house and preparing it to be a suitable place in which she might for the rest of her time here sit by the fire and dream of the past. Then the war had happened, and for a few years she had felt so much younger, but now, when it was finished, so much older than the years spent by the war justified her in feeling. She had made many friends. Indeed, she had never possessed so many as now. But these friendships formed late in life had little value. Friendship needed the future. There must exist in any friendship worth having a kind of physical exultation. She was fonder of this little cat than of all her Paris friends, much fonder. Pierrette was young. Youth! Youth! It was not that she longed to be young again herself. That would be foolish and indeed an undignified repining; but to be surrounded by youth, that was surely a legitimate desire.

"And it's that of which fate has robbed me," she sighed aloud.

Pierrette wagged her tail. The sound of her friend's voice was so pleasant to hear, and the silken knee was so delicate a resting-place for a royal cat. This soft-spoken human being deserved a little attention. Her hands were tactful. Not like Célestine's hands. Célestine was the maid who had taken the place of Adèle, dead before her mistress returned to Paris, a move which would have given Adèle so much pleasure. Pierrette did not care for Célestine, who was always lifting her off delightful nests of lace and silk. Célestine, in Pierrette's opinion, had the hands of a butcher rather than of a lady's maid. The thought of Célestine gave her a *fisson,* and she yawned in disgust.

Mary held Pierrette so that the cat's equilibrium should not be disturbed while she leaned over to ring the bell. It was morbid to sit here in the twilight thinking about youth. But when François had arranged to his satisfaction the folds of the brocaded curtains and when he had turned on the lights and left the room in a radiancy of rose, Mary could not think about what she called practical things, which meant the *séance* she had arranged for to-night. Her headache was gone; but the shadows of the past which had crept out of their lurking-places in the twilight were still in the *salon,* not visible indeed, but all the more hauntingly insistent because they were not visible. The room seemed vaster and lonelier now that every corner of it was illuminated. Mary felt infinitely small and utterly deserted. It was

only the company of the small cat which kept her from getting up and hurrying away in panic. *"Le demon du midi,"* she found herself repeating. What specter begotten of gloom and shadow could outlive the horror that existed in a desert of light? Her nerves were upset. Perhaps she was indulging too frequently in these spiritualistic experiments. But what else was there to do? If she were to renounce all activity, she would just sit shriveling slowly before the fire. After all, sixty was not such a great age. One would have to be at least seventy before one really considered oneself old. And probably even at seventy one would find that seventy was by no means the great age it had formerly seemed. Even eighty? Grandmamma had been eighty when she died. She had looked very old; but had she really felt old? Did anybody ever really feel old? What seemed so bad about the arrangement of human life was the amount of time wasted at the beginning and the end. The first ten years, for example, what were they worth? Mary was watering her nasturtiums in that abandoned room of the warehouse in Pasternoster Row. "Old stock!" She could hear the very tones of Mr. Fawcus' voice. And the sunlight on the golden cross of St. Paul's. It flashed upon her inner eye more vividly than all the sunlight of the last twenty years put together. A sudden pity seized her for the two old people who had fostered her and from whom she had been so abruptly snatched. She saw Mr. Fawcus with his

big bandana handkerchief wiping away the tears and waving his farewell from Dover Quay. How little she had understood what it cost them to lose her! How gayly she had set out for Paris! She ought when she was older to have visited them. It was wrong of her grandmother to forbid all intercourse. Suppose she should be given the guardianship of Geoffrey's little daughter, should she try to keep her away from her mother? Mary tried to think that she would not, although it was hard to be charitable about Geoffrey's wife. When he was killed early in 1915, it surely ought not to have been impossible for his wife to forgive. She had written to her so anxiously. Perhaps it had been a mistake to inclose another check. A woman like that might have supposed that she was trying to buy her. Still, to send back the check torn in half, that surely was not justifiable after so many years. She had not suggested that the little girl should be handed over to herself entirely. She had only asked for a few months every year. Would Geoffrey really have wished that his mother should be debarred from helping her granddaughter? Had it really been Geoffrey replying the other evening through the medium of *la planchette? Mary must go to her grandmother.* Nobody except herself knew anything about Geoffrey's little girl, and she herself had certainly not guided the pencil. It was all very well for skeptics to say that one guided the pencil unconsciously. Anything could be explained by auto-sug-

gestion; but it was not reasonable to explain the inexplicable by something every bit as inexplicable. If it was auto-suggestion, why had she never succeeded in getting a communication from Richard's spirit. If ever anybody desired with all her heart and soul to speak with one dead, she desired to speak with Richard. Yet he was silent. With all the will she had to believe that he would come to her out of that immense world of death, she had never received any message that could possibly be ascribed to him. How hard she had often tried to twist those unintelligible scrawls into words of hope and assurance from Richard! If auto-suggestion could have done it, surely auto-suggestion would have done it. All theories about the world of spirits were no doubt inadequate; but it seemed natural to suppose that year by year the dead moved farther and farther away from the earth, and therefore that Richard was already beyond her reach. Geoffrey, on the other hand, died comparatively a short time ago. Moreover, without being ridiculous one might imagine that the number of people killed every day during the war would produce—— Mary paused. She could not help feeling that the picture of a crowded railway junction which her ideas of the confines of eternity implied was rather absurd. Perhaps the Sicilian crystal-gazer would throw some light upon the problem this evening. She would make a great effort to put out of her mind the notion of being given the guardianship of Geoffrey's little girl. She

would concentrate upon something entirely different. Pierre for instance. He too had been killed out in West Africa early in the war. It was the end he would have chosen for himself. It was a fine death for a man over sixty to be killed in action, a fine death for the boy who fifty years ago had followed the drum-taps along that white road of France. It had given her a thrill of pride to read of his career since he and she parted forty years ago. He was one of those who had helped to prepare his country for the effort she had to make to save herself from the ancient enemy. Thus had they written of him who had loved herself as well as his country forty years ago. Such a little time ago really. If she shut her eyes and thought for a moment, she could reconjure every moment of that last meeting in the drawing-room of the King's Gate house.

"I wonder what you would have thought of Mac?" she asked, stroking Pierrette, who accepted the caress with a purr that showed how far she was from grasping the insult of such a question.

"Mac was a dog, you know. And you don't much care for dogs, do you, my dear?"

Pierrette continued to purr when Mary patted her, laughing.

"Conceited little cat!"

And then once more her consciousness was flooded with the apprehension of how much Pierrette meant to her. Those fragile paws soft as flower-buds with thorns for the unwary, that foolish tail not much

bigger than a small cigar and of the same color, and most of all those big blue eyes indifferent as chalcedony, supercilious as a prince of Siam, and for a ball of wool sent rolling across the floor wild as a leopard that waits to spring upon a sheep, how much they represented in her lonely existence.

"Pierrette, would you like to be married?"

The little cat put out her claws with the air of an affronted virgin.

"Wouldn't you like to have a nice husband to play with when I'm too busy to play with you? Wouldn't you like to have dear little snow-white kittens? Because your kittens would be snow-white when they were born,. you know. Would you be a good mother?"

Notwithstanding Pierrette's lack of interest in the suggestion, Mary was much taken up by the notion of obtaining a mate for her. It came to seem of the utmost importance that Pierrette should hand on her charm to kittens like herself. The search for a Siamese male as well-bred, as beautiful, and as intelligent as herself occupied Mary's time more successfully than spiritualism. It happened that the crystal-gazer recommended by Madame de Sarlovèze was, at any rate so far as Mary's *séance* was concerned, a complete failure and unable to perceive anything except various indeterminate shapes which she most dubiously likened to pigeons. When nobody present could muster up the faintest interest in pigeons, the charlatan (thus already Mary char-

acterized her entertainer) suggested even more dubiously that they might be swans.

"Or geese," Mary had muttered sharply, whereupon Madame Diana had turned sulky and complained that she could not hope to have any success with the crystal when scoffers were present.

"The woman's an obvious fraud with her pigeons," Mary declared; and she turned her attention to a husband for Pierrette, a commodity which was unprocurable in Paris. A friend assured her that the best European strain of Siamese cats was to be found in Vienna, and in spite of the difficulties of traveling Mary would have set out for Vienna if another friend had not suggested that the famous strain would by now probably have succumbed to the effects of the war. In the end, she went to England, accompanied by Pierrette, for by now nothing else mattered except that Pierrette should have kittens.

Mary took rooms in the Victoria Palace Hotel overlooking Kensington Gardens, where with Célestine and Pierrette she settled down to spend Christmas. The gayety of the golden shops in High Street reminded her too poignantly of Christmastides when the boys came home from school for the holidays; and when Muriel who had heard of her mother's arrival in England wrote to suggest that she should spend Christmas as the guest of the Community, it seemed a wise way of escaping from the sadness of memory.

The house of which Muriel was sister-in-charge

was in a remote Gloucestershire village and was used as a home for old women whom the Order befriended. Mary felt rather like one of those old women herself when she attended vespers in the little chapel on the evening of her arrival. It did not seem credible that the capable sister of whom everybody, including herself, stood so much in awe was her own daughter. Muriel appeared not a day older than when she entered the Order ten years ago.

"I was wrong, dear," her mother said, when she was sitting in the parlor with Muriel during recreation on Christmas Eve. "I was quite wrong, dear, to oppose your becoming a nun. Your intention took me so completely by surprise that I never had time to imagine the lines on which you might develop. It is only now when I see you mistress of your own house, as it were, that I realize how perfectly the life suits your temperament."

And that night when after Mass the old women, flotsam from life's seat at last forever still, knelt round the crib where lay the image of the infant Saviour, Mary began to apprehend that there was in the Christian religion something more satisfying than the ambiguous promises and performances of crystal-gazers, than the always to be suspected rappings and tappings of mediums. Her mind went back to hours spent with Mademoiselle Lucinge in her gray room at Châteaublanc when the garden was melodious with autumnal birdsong and above the notes of robin-redbreasts Mademoiselle spoke

to her about God. This summer she would revisit Châteaublanc, and perhaps in the little church where her old schoolmistress had prayed for the woes of France to be lightened she should find that perfect assurance of something beyond which had been denied to her grandmother, but granted to her own daughter. She looked across to where in the flickering candlelight Muriel knelt praying, her eyes turned heavenward and full of tears. Tears for what? For the mere imagination of the reality of that Divine Infant in the manger of Bethlehem. To Muriel's limpid faith had been granted all that motherhood could confer on woman. To her kneeling there belonged a baby that would never grow up to compass her disillusionment, a baby that promised to all who believed in Him immortal life. Hers, hers by the gift of faith.

Yet when Mary tried to give herself what she was able to understand had been given to Muriel, she could only perceive the image and miss the reality it tried to express. The faces of the old women kneeling round the crib appeared as meaningless as a row of pippins on the shelf of a store-room. For the sake of a comfortable bed and plenty of food they would have been every bit as willing to kneel round *la planchette.*

"Do you believe, dear child, in the possibility of communicating with the dead?" Mary asked her daughter at the first opportunity she was given of talking to her in private.

"If you mean, do I believe in spiritualism, I certainly do not," said Muriel severely. "And if there *is* anything in it, I should say that it was controlled by the spirits of evil. I wish you wouldn't practice such a wretched substitute for worship," she continued. "I cannot understand why people who profess to believe in such hocus-pocus do not submit themselves to the demands of a true religion. It is surely just as easy to accept the doctrines of Christianity as the frauds of mediums."

"There are some people, Muriel, who think that real religion has been ruined by ecclesiastical bigotry. Personally I have never been able to accept a man-made religion. You see, dear, I have been so much in the world. I have suffered so many disappointments and disillusionments that the notion of a man standing between myself and the hereafter is repugnant."

"My dear mother, if you will forgive me for saying so, you are really talking nonsense. All your life you have been accustomed to rely upon yourself instead of upon God. You cannot expect to receive faith if you do not ask for it."

"Auto-suggestion!" Mary exclaimed. "When I receive a direct communication from the world of spirits, I am told it is auto-suggestion. But surely to receive a belief that you expect to receive can only be called auto-suggestion. Mind, I do not say that what you believe is not true. I am perfectly sure in any case that it is highly suitable for you to be-

lieve it, for I have never seen you looking better. Nothing could have given me greater delight than to behold your happiness in the life to which you have dedicated yourself. I am only trying to suggest that there may be other ways of approaching the unseen and, however inadequately, of solving the great problem that lies before us all, a problem which I am likely to solve, I hope, many years before you. I hold no brief for spiritualism. In fact, the more I see of its practice the less I am attracted to it. I envy you your faith, dear child. I envy and respect it. And I've greatly enjoyed my little visit."

"It is very peaceful down here," Muriel agreed with a smile.

"And old age will have no terrors for you," her mother murmured. "Because I understand so well that for you old age will simply seem a slow and tranquil drawing nearer to God. Happy little girl of mine!"

"Yes, I am happy."

"And that makes me happy, for it helps me to realize that so far as my children are concerned I have not been a complete failure. I wish I could stay here longer, but I've left my little cat in London with only my maid to look after her, and I think I ought to be getting back."

Mary perceived that an obligation to a cat was something utterly incomprehensible to her daughter, and when she kissed her good-by, kissed those cheeks cold and faintly flushed like the petals of a Christ-

mas rose, she felt that she was parting from a creature more remote than either of her dead sons.

"Flesh of my flesh," Mary thought. "And yet my little cat is nearer to me. Those are the kind of puzzles that really do make human life a riddle."

Mary remembered how sometimes her grandmother had tried to draw near to herself, because the two of them were all that was left of a family.

"She must have supposed that my remoteness came from my mother's blood. But it probably would not have made much difference if I had been her own daughter. I suppose that we all grow to resent those first years of dependence upon other people. I suppose we all care only to think of ourselves as complete personalities. And is there anything more to come? Is there? Is there? Or do we instinctively know that this life is the whole of our individual life and for that reason do we cling so hard to being ourselves while we live it? And when we are growing old, do we crave for the contact of youth in order to delude ourselves with the belief that we shall grow young again in death?"

When Mary reached the hotel, she was met by Célestine with a grave and frightened countenance.

In a moment Mary guessed what had happened.

"Pierrette is ill."

The maid burst into tears.

"Very ill?"

"Madame, Pierrette est morte. J'ai telegraphié ce matin. Le medicin etait très brave pour elle,

mais la grippe, Madame, la grippe! Elle a souffert beaucoup, la pauvre petite!"

The manager of the hotel drew near to express his condolences and to explain that he had assisted Mrs. Alison's maid in every way by telephoning for the best veterinary doctor in Knightsbridge. He had advised Mrs. Alison's being communicated with by telegram as soon as the animal's serious condition was obvious. Yesterday it had seemed unnecessary to summon Mrs. Alison back from the country. Of course, if he had known then that the illness was likely to terminate fatally he should have done so. He appreciated what the loss of such a pet meant. Only this summer his wife had lost a pet cockatoo, and she had been quite inconsolable for two days. One did not expect a cockatoo to die suddenly. One always thought of them as living forever. He was sorry that it had not been possible to keep the dead cat in the hotel, but Mrs. Alison would understand that it might be liable to create an unpleasant impression upon the other guests. So many people dreaded influenza in any shape. It was with the deepest regret that he had ordered the remains to be taken away; but he was sure that the sight of the poor little dead animal would have been a grief for Mrs. Alison. Could he send anything up to her room? It was early for tea; but, after her journey and the sad news, perhaps Mrs. Alison would like her tea early.

"We shall return to Paris to-night," said Mary.

"Go and pack my things, Célestine. I do not wish to go upstairs to my room. I shall take a little walk in the Gardens by myself. By myself."

It was an afternoon of silver frost and sunshine under a pale blue December sky. The walks of Kensington Gardens were thronged with children whose vivid laughter made Mary feel of less account in the human scene than one of the skeleton leaves lying on a bed of last year's flowers. She tried to escape from the sounds of youth and merriment; but wherever she walked the air was full of laughter, the crystalline air tinkled with laughter.

Had Pierrette wanted her at the end? Had she failed the one living creature in the whole world that might have looked to her? Question for evermore unanswerable, regret for evermore unquenchable, longing for evermore unappeasable!

She had not felt able to revisit the room where she had left Pierrette sitting so cosily by the fire, when she set out to Gloucestershire; and yet she had been able to decide to go back to the house in Paris which without Pierrette would seem emptier, vaster, lonelier than ever.

If now she could pray!

For what?

For mercy upon her old age.

For something to lead her out of the shadows.

Darling little cat! Not ever again to feel those silken chocolate paws. Not ever again to hear that deep miaow, nor behold those unyielding eyes of

blue, nor watch that absurd tail respond to her lightest murmur on the assumption that any sound uttered in an empty room was intended for herself.

An empty room? Empty indeed now, a thousand times emptier now that Pierrette was dead.

If she could only pray!

Would that serene daughter of hers be able to pray if she found herself alone like this under the trees that looked not a day older than when forty years ago she had walked beneath their boughs with Mac? Would not Muriel suffer a dismay? Would not she doubt the value of her prayers?

There would be no communication with the spirit of Pierrette. There would be no deep-voiced miaows scrawled by *la planchette,* not with the help of all the auto-suggestion in her being. She was irrevocably vanished, as irrevocably as a flower.

The little cat was not. Her grace and beauty were lost; her lithe and shapely form was destroyed. Her memory would endure for a little while until her friend died; and when she died there would never have been a cat called Pierrette. She would be less than one of the crushed shells among these myriads of crushed shells that were strewn upon the walks of Kensington Gardens. How heedless was the laughter of the children all around her, and yet there were few of those children who would not themselves know sorrow before they were old. Would they hear then the echo of their youth's heedless laughter?

When Mary came back to the house in Paris she found a letter waiting for her.

92 Carminia Road,
Balham, S. W.,
December 26, 1920.

Dear Madam,

This is to inform you that last week Mrs. Alison, your daughter-in-law, died of the influenza very suddenly the week before Xmas. As I understood from her who was her sister that you were anxious to have the care of her little girl, and as me and my husband cannot undertake the responsibility we are taking the liberty of asking if you would kindly accept delivery of the little girl as per this letter. My sister, Mrs. Alison, kept your address in her writing materials and I have taken the liberty to write to you direct hoping I may be pardoned for the intrusion. She is a very nice well-behaved little girl and my husband and me are very sorry to part with her which we wouldn't want to do if we hadn't six of our own which makes it a bit difficult in a small house and not being very rich people. The little girl could be dispatched to Paris to suit your convenience if you would kindly remit cost of sending her as per your instructions which we duly await.

And I am,
Yours truly,
Emily Bocock.
(Mrs. Alfred Bocock.)

"Célestine! Célestine!"

"Madame?" cried Célestine, running to find out what her mistress wanted.

"Célestine, pack my things, we are going back to London."

"Tout de suit, Madame?"

"Don't stop to argue, Célestine. Pack! Pack!"

The preparations for their return to London were no sooner finished than Mary was seized with nervousness. Suppose she presented herself at this house to fetch her granddaughter and the little girl, who by now was twelve and likely to have a mind of her own, refused to accompany her? It would be a dreadfully inauspicious beginning to what she hoped was going to be the happiest time since Richard was alive. It would be easier to welcome the child here by herself. She should feel less self-conscious, and the child separated from her companions would be more ready to accept her grandmother. If she had a house in London it would be different; but she should be afraid to take her to an hotel. Yes, it was better to be patient for an extra day and send Célestine to fetch her. Besides, there was much to prepare here. There was Mary's bedroom to be got ready. She must choose the furniture herself. She knew exactly what a child of twelve would like. There were toys to buy. She would not be too old for dolls and a really good doll's-house and a variety of games which perhaps she would enjoy playing with her grandmother. It might be advisable to be-

gin looking about for a good governess. If only she could find somebody like Mademoiselle Lucinge. Yes, it would be wiser to send Célestine to fetch her. Célestine could be trusted? Or should she telegraph to Muriel and ask her to arrange for a trustworthy person to escort the child? No, that might delay matters. Muriel was so particular, and in Gloucestershire she might not be able to find the right person at once. No, Célestine must go.

On New Year's Day Mary was sitting by the fireside reading a yellow French novel. The doors of the *salon* were flung open by François, and she heard the voice of her maid.

"Allez-y, mademoiselle. Voilà Madame qui vous attend."

Thin black legs moving in gingerly steps over the gleaming parquet. A shy face hiding itself in the wraps of the long journey.

"My darling child, here you are at last!"

"Oh, grandmother, you've thrown your book in the fire. Shall I pick it out for you?"

Yes, a slight Cockney accent, but what did that matter when in her arms she held youth, when to her heart she pressed youth?

"My little girl, I'm so glad you're come to live with your old grandmother."

THE END

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